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MATTHEW AUSTIN.<sup>1</sup>

BY W. E. NORRIS.

CHAPTER XIII.

LEONARD GIVES HIS OPINION.



SOMETIMES, after the turn of the year and long before the spring, there come to us dwellers in a northern island, of which the rigorous climate is mitigated by that ever-blessed Gulf Stream, a few days so mild and soft and sunshiny that they seem to have been plucked by mistake out of the brief coming summer which is our due. Birds begin to chirp and twitter, windows are thrown open, fires are allowed to burn low, and the half-forgotten smell of the moist earth greets our expanded nostrils.

Well, we all know what that means. Presently the wind will work round by north to east, where it will stick for six weeks without a break; the winter is only playing with us; the worst of our miseries are yet to come, and it is ten to one that every man and woman whom we meet in the course of the day will accost us with the same sagacious observation—'Ah, we shall pay for this later on!'

Such, indeed, was the original and novel remark which Leonard Jerome had just made, one fine afternoon, to his friend and medical adviser, in whose pretty, old-fashioned drawing-room he was lounging at his ease, with his hands in his pockets and his long legs stretched out before him. Of his legs he had for some time past enjoyed the full use, and, although one of his arms was still in a sling, the other had recently been set free. Long con-

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finement to the house had toned down the usual ruddy brownness of his complexion ; but this pallor was not unbecoming, and, taking him altogether, his appearance was of a nature to reflect credit both upon his doctor and upon the friend who was about to exhibit him to a couple of expectant ladies.

‘The future may pretty generally be counted upon to take its revenge on the present,’ Matthew said, in answer to his gloomy forecast. ‘Why not make the best of good times while they last?’

He was thinking of other things besides the weather as he spoke. His good time, he very well knew, was irrevocably destined to be short, and it was not always that he could manage to act upon his own excellent advice. Still he had at least one small matter for self-congratulation in that neither frost nor rain nor snow had intervened to put a stop to his little tea-party. A less disinterested or a more apprehensive man might not have been in so great a hurry to introduce the handsome and eligible Mr. Jerome to the object of his affections ; but Matthew flattered himself that he had no silly illusions. Leonard Jerome or another—what did it matter to him, since it was obvious that a provincial practitioner could never stand in the position of a rival to Lilian’s suitor or suitors?

‘I hope that old Lady Sara of yours won’t expect a one-armed man to trundle her round the garden in her bath-chair,’ Leonard was beginning, when the door was thrown open and the subject of his groundless alarm walked in.

Lady Sara, who was now almost as well as she had been before her dangerous illness, scarcely looked like an invalid. Always well dressed, carrying herself gracefully, and retaining, as she did, perceptible vestiges of the beauty for which she had been famous in years gone by, she could hardly fail to produce a favourable impression upon a stranger. But of course it was not upon her that the gaze of this admiring and astonished stranger became instantly riveted. Matthew saw that, and experienced a momentary sensation of pain on witnessing what he saw ; but, after all, it was only what he had been fully prepared for, and, for that matter, had desired. He would have been much disappointed if Leonard Jerome had not admired Miss Murray. When the necessary introductions had been effected, and the inquiries and condolences which the occasion called for had been interchanged, he said briskly :

'Now, shall we have tea first and flowers afterwards, or will you come out into the garden at once? I can allow you to choose, Lady Sara, because on such an afternoon as this I sha'n't feel it my duty to pack you off home for another hour and a half.'

Lady Sara replied that, under those circumstances, she would have her tea. 'I want to look about me before I do anything else,' she said. 'What a dear old room!—and what a number of pretty things you have got! Is that a Bartolozzi?'

She moved away to examine the engraving which had attracted her attention and proceeded to inspect Matthew's modest stock of treasures, taking her host with her and leaving—perhaps not altogether without design—the two younger people to entertain one another. The young people, however, did not seem to be particularly eager to fall in with her wishes. Some few observations they must have exchanged, but it was not long before Matthew became aware that Lilian was at his elbow, and while the tea was being carried in she took occasion to say to him in an agitated whisper:

'Freeze to me!—don't leave me for a moment! I won't perambulate the garden for three-quarters of an hour with that masher!'

'You will like him very much when you have talked a little more to him,' returned Matthew, in amused and subdued accents; 'he is as far removed from being a masher as I am. A more manly, unaffected young fellow I never met, and——'

'Oh, yes,' interrupted the girl impatiently, 'I dare say he is all that, and he is right enough with other men, and just now he is wearing his country clothes. But I can see him in a frock-coat and a tall hat, all the same, and I don't want to be bothered with him. *Please* hand him over to Mamma; they are sure to have any number of common acquaintances, and they will get on together splendidly.'

It is all very well to assert that the path of duty is not invariably unpleasant, and that to do what is distasteful to us is not necessarily to perform a meritorious action, but we are all firmly convinced of the contrary, nor could Matthew doubt that he was bound to disregard this seductive entreaty. His place, beyond all question, was by Lady Sara's side, and he gallantly claimed it. After tea—which informal repast, somehow or other, afforded fewer opportunities for the development of informality than might have been hoped for—she accepted the support of his

proffered arm, and he led her forth into the cool greenhouse, Leonard and Lilian following closely in the wake of the couple and displaying marked anxiety to be included in the general conversation. It was ridiculous of them to behave in that way; still, so long as they chose to do it, nobody could prevent them; and their entertainer, by reason of the frailty of his mortal nature, was more tickled than provoked with their conduct.

But they could not possibly keep it up. Even if Bush, who was in attendance, had been less long-winded and Lady Sara less ecstatically loquacious, the obstinate silence with which their occasional diffident comments upon a subject about which neither of them knew anything at all were received must eventually have forced them back upon one another, and their mutual animosity had already undergone some diminution before Lady Sara, after minutely examining the fragrant blooms in the stove-house, announced, with every appearance of regret, that she was too tired to walk round the grounds.

'I shall go back to the drawing-room and wait for you, while Mr. Austin does the honours,' said she. 'Don't think of hurrying; I can make myself quite happy with a book.'

Naturally, Matthew protested that his notion of doing the honours was to remain with his chief guest, adding that 'the grounds' were not so extensive as to require a guide: naturally, also, Lilian felt that it would be hardly polite to avow the absolute indifference with which she regarded Mr. Austin's cherished shrubs. So her ladyship carried her point, after all—a point to which, in truth, she attached scanty importance. Only, as the mother of a marriageable daughter, she felt it incumbent upon her to neglect no chance that might turn up.

'Your young friend is handsome, but scarcely brilliant,' she remarked, on her way back towards the house. 'I should think there was no fear of his being disinherited. Why should anybody wish to disinherit such a nice, gentlemanlike, commonplace sort of person?'

Perhaps that was not quite the light in which Lilian saw Mr. Jerome; assuredly it was not the light in which that young man was accustomed to see himself. Anyhow, his first remark to his companion, while they paced, somewhat sullenly, side by side, down one of the gravel paths, could not fairly be stigmatised as commonplace.

'May I ask,' he began, 'whether I have been unfortunate



enough to strike you as more objectionable and offensive than the ordinary run of casual acquaintances?’

She thought it decidedly objectionable and offensive on his part to put such a question, but, being as yet unversed in the art of fine innuendo, could hit upon no other rejoinder than the rather bald and curt one of ‘Not at all.’

‘I am glad of that; because I was afraid, from the savage manner in which you have been snubbing me all this time, that I had unintentionally done something that you couldn’t forgive.’

‘That is nonsense,’ returned Lilian impatiently. ‘You are much too well satisfied with yourself to have been afraid of anything of the sort, and if I had really snubbed you, you would have turned your back upon me at once and begun to talk to my mother. Why didn’t you?’

‘Ah, now we are getting at it; now one begins to perceive what one’s offence has been! Well, really, Miss Murray, it was no fault of mine. I don’t want to be rude, but the unvarnished truth is that I would quite as soon have talked to your mother as to you, if only I had been allowed. Dense as I have no doubt you think me, I have intelligence enough to understand that you came here to see our friend Austin, not me.’

‘You would indeed have been dense if you had imagined that I came here to see you,’ Lilian rejoined, with an angry laugh; for at this period of her life she had not learnt to disguise her emotions, and did not in the least care how rude she might appear to a young man whom she had rather hastily set down as supercilious and conceited. She went on to say, in a needlessly defiant tone, ‘Mr. Austin is a very great friend of ours. He saved my mother’s life, and he has been kindness itself to us ever since we came here. I don’t believe there is anybody else in the world like him.’

‘Then we have at least found one subject upon which we are of the same mind,’ remarked Leonard good-humouredly, ‘for Austin is a very great friend of mine too, and I agree with you in doubting whether there is anybody else in the world quite like him. I can’t say that he has saved my life, but that is only because I haven’t given him the chance, and as for kindness, I have had as much of that from him as I can carry. Don’t you think we might make friends—you and I—upon the strength of our common affection for a third person? It would be more comfortable if we could, because I suppose we are bound to spend a short time

together in examining the third person's outdoor plants. He is sure to catechise us about them when we go in.'

'Very well; it need not take us long, I should think,' was Lilian's somewhat ungracious response to these overtures.

But, as a matter of fact, their stroll over the two modest acres which were inclosed by Mr. Austin's garden fence did last a good deal longer than one of them was aware of. Leonard Jerome had never earned, nor desired to earn, the odious reputation of a lady-killer; still he had all his life been accustomed to be a favourite with the opposite sex, and he was not unnaturally piqued by the disdain with which the beautiful Miss Murray had seen fit to treat him so far. He felt that he owed it to himself to convince her that she was under some misapprehension or other, and in truth the task of putting her into a better humour proved to be no very hard one. He talked so simply, boyishly and pleasantly that she soon had to change her opinion of him; he did not brag of his prowess in field sports or his intimate knowledge of smart society, as she had felt certain that he would do; and if his conversation was a trifle egotistical, it was not the less interesting on that account. There are people who can discourse quite charmingly about themselves—who, in fact, cannot discourse with anything approaching the same charm upon other topics. So Lilian heard the whole—or, at any rate, as much as could be related to her—of Mr. Jerome's personal history, was informed that he possessed a place in the far north where he supposed he would have to take up his residence some fine day, learnt that he was not nearly as well off as he would like to be, and was candidly told that he based great hopes, not unmingled with misgivings, upon the provisions of his uncle's will.

'The worst of it is,' said he, 'that one never knows what to be at with Uncle Richard. Sometimes he growls at me for not being in Parliament or making some other good use of what he is pleased to call my talents, and then, when I least expect it, he'll turn round upon me and abuse me for spending a couple of months in London when I might have been leading a healthy life in the country. It takes more patience than I can boast of to put up with him. However, we have got on rather better together of late, thanks to dear old Austin, who stands between us and strokes us both down. Austin has quite won my uncle's heart.'

'I don't wonder at that,' remarked Lilian.

'I expect you would wonder a little if you knew Uncle Richard.

I am not surprised at Austin's winning any quantity of other hearts, though.'

Leonard concluded his sentence with a sigh, to which Miss Murray took instant exception.

'Oh, if you mean that he is lucky to be so popular, you understand very little about it,' said she. 'You can have the same luck and the same popularity whenever you like. All you have to do is to be as good and kind and unselfish as he is.'

'That is all, is it? Then luckless and unpopular I shall remain to the end of my days, I am afraid. The only consolation is that nine-tenths of the human race must be in the same boat with me. Even you yourself, perhaps.'

'Oh, I don't pretend to be anything but thoroughly selfish, and I don't think I particularly care about being popular,' answered the girl. 'Hadn't we better go in now?'

A quarter of an hour later Matthew was walking across the fields towards Wilverton Grange with his young friend, whom he had undertaken to see part of the way home. Lady Sara, laden with the flowers which Bush, in obedience to orders, had reluctantly cut for her, had been wheeled away in her bath-chair, after taking a very cordial leave of her entertainer and her fellow-guest. She had begged the latter to call upon her any afternoon when he should have nothing better to do, and he had accepted the invitation with eager alacrity. Just now he was eulogising Miss Murray's beauty in unmeasured terms.

'The most beautiful girl I have ever seen in all my life, bar none!' he declared emphatically.

'Ah, I was pretty sure that you would think so,' Matthew observed, with a laugh which did not sound altogether merry.

'Well, *you* think so too, don't you?'

'Oh, yes; I think so too.'

'Mind you, I don't say she is quite the nicest girl I have ever met; though she may even be that to other people, for anything that I know to the contrary. But not to me. Oh, no, she took very good care not to be nice to me—which was rather unkind of her, considering what a lot of trouble I took to be nice to her. Was I to blame for not being Matthew Austin, M.D., or for having been ordered by Matthew Austin, M.D., to perambulate a damp garden with her, when I would much sooner have been sitting before the fire?'

'I am not entitled to write M.D. after my name, and you are

not entitled to shirk the duties that belong to your age,' Matthew answered. 'Not that I believe for one moment that you wished to shirk them. Was it for Lady Sara's sake that you jumped with such avidity at her permission to you to call in Prospect Place?'

'I am sorry, my dear Austin,' said the younger man, 'to notice in you a tendency towards humbug, which I had imagined to be foreign to your character. I trust it is only humbug. I trust it isn't the jealousy which it pretends to be. Because, if it were, I should have to write you down not as an M.D. but as a D.D. ass.'

'Jealousy!—at my age!'

'Oh, that puts the matter beyond a doubt; if you weren't a horrid old humbug you wouldn't begin to talk about your age. Why, what are you?—five and thirty?'

'Not quite so much; but I dare say I look more, and I know I often feel more. Anyhow, I am centuries older than Miss Murray: added to which, I am her mother's physician and a mere nobody in point of rank. By all means call me an ass, if you like; but please acquit me of having been such an ass as to fix my provincial and medical affections upon a young lady who is not unlikely to figure as one of the fashionable beauties of the coming London season.'

Leonard did not reply at once; the two men were just then walking in single file through a copse, traversed by a narrow foot-path. But when they emerged into a pasture he laid his one available hand upon Matthew's shoulder and said:

'Now, look here, old chap; we've been pretty good friends, haven't we?—and I don't see the use of making mysteries. Of course I don't want you to tell me anything that you would prefer to keep to yourself; only, you know, you did virtually tell me everything some time ago.'

'I told you everything? I don't know what you mean!'

ejaculated Matthew, in honest bewilderment.

'Why, my dear man, you weren't under the impression that you hadn't betrayed yourself a hundred times, were you? I didn't respond as I might have done, because I wanted to have a look at the young woman first. Well, I have had a look at her now, and I congratulate you. Rubbish about your age and your rank! You are every bit as good as she is in one sense, and a great deal better in another. Her mother, I grant you, may not be of that opinion just at first; but what then? It will be all right, so long as you don't insist upon depreciating yourself to them. It's a

mistake to depreciate yourself, and a man of your wisdom ought to know it.'

Matthew was so taken aback that it was some minutes before he recovered full possession of his faculties. By the time that he had done so he could no longer dispute the accuracy of Leonard Jerome's conjectures; but he gave many good reasons—of which the young man made light—for his determination to keep his secret to himself, so far as Lilian and her mother were concerned.

'And, after all,' he concluded, 'there is such a thing as absolutely disinterested love. It is possible——'

'Oh, no, it isn't,' interrupted the other. 'You will never get me to believe that; and when you say such things you almost make me doubt whether you are really in love with the girl at all.'

'You needn't doubt that. There is no more doubt about my being in love with her than there is about the impossibility of her ever falling in love with me.'

'Austin, you exasperate me. I don't want you to walk any farther with me this evening, thanks; I would rather you went back home and considered your ways. If you don't know that Miss Murray simply adores you, all I can say is you ought to know it. But I expect you do, and you are only trying to find out what she said to me about you in the garden. 'You're a lucky devil; though I'm not going to deny that you deserve your luck. Now good night—and be hanged to you!'

With that, he turned away and, breaking into a trot, was soon lost to sight in the falling darkness.

'I dare say,' muttered Matthew to himself, as he stroked his short beard meditatively, 'that from his point of view I did seem to be insincere. But of course he wouldn't understand.'

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### A GRACEFUL RETREAT.

It is possible that when an attack of gout declines to yield to treatment (as it almost invariably does) something may be done towards hastening the sufferer's recovery by means of cheerful conversation and sanguine assurances. Such, at all events, were the remedies employed by Matthew in the case of Mr. Frere,

whose enemy released him a full week earlier than usual and who not unnaturally ascribed to one species of dexterity what was more probably due to another.

'That fellow,' he told his wife confidentially, 'ought to be at the head of his profession. He has no business to bury himself down here—though I'm sure *I* don't want him to leave us. It's true that there is plenty of money to be made in Wilverton, and he ought to grow rich as soon as he has cut old Jennings out—which he is bound to do, sooner or later, whether he wishes it or not. People can't be expected to put up with incompetency out of a sentimental regard for vested interests. Oh, don't throw Litton at my head! Litton, I know, sticks to Jennings, in spite of all that Austin has done for that nephew of his; but then Litton hasn't had the gout yet.'

Mrs. Frere felt no special interest in Mr. Litton, a surly old curmudgeon with whom it was impossible to maintain neighbourly relations; but her curiosity had been slightly excited with regard to his nephew ever since somebody had told her that that young man had twice been seen to emerge from Lady Sara Murray's door.

'So the Murrays are friends of your friend the broken-boned bicycle rider, I hear,' she took an early opportunity of remarking to Matthew. 'Where did they fall in with him?—in London?'

'No; they met him for the first time at my house,' Matthew answered. 'I thought it would be a kindness both to them and to Jerome to bring them together, and I wanted Miss Frere to come the same day. However, she wouldn't: she says she dislikes young men.'

'Poor dear Anne! Yes; I am afraid it is only too true that she does *not* like young men, and I live in constant dread of her coming to announce to me that she has accepted an elderly widower, with a large family and a small income. That is just the sort of dreadful thing that Anne would delight in doing, if she got the chance. One can't be thankful enough that all the poverty-stricken paterfamilias hereabouts are blessed with exceptionally robust wives. But wasn't it a little bit imprudent of you to take the responsibility of presenting a more or less interesting youth to that lovely girl?'

'I don't think so. She will have to meet a number of more or less interesting youths before long, you see.'

'Yes; but taking them in the lump is quite another affair,

and if anything were to happen, her mother would be sure to lay the blame on you. Because, although young Jerome has expectations, he is no great catch as he stands. I think, if I had been you, I should have left it alone.'

'You are the last person whom I should have suspected of being so worldly and wary,' Matthew said, laughing.

'Ah, I'm like David Copperfield's landlady, "I'm a mother myself." When it comes to be a question of daughters and marriages we are all apt to be worldly; we can't very well help it. Let us hope that Lady Sara is sufficiently so for the purpose.'

From what Matthew knew of Lady Sara Murray, he thought it probable that her worldliness would prove equal to the occasion; but he did not know as much as Mrs. Frere did about her recent relations with young Jerome, stress of work having prevented him from visiting Prospect Place since the occurrence of the episodes recorded in the last chapter. Leonard's words had made a certain impression upon him, and of course he had thought a good deal about them; but his common sense had preserved him from taking them too literally. It was easy to understand how the misapprehension had arisen—easy to conjecture that Lilian had made use of more emphatic language in speaking of a man whom she liked than she would have done in speaking of a man whom she loved, and it was not surprising that a young fellow who was doing his best to be agreeable to her should have been spurred by vexation towards erroneous conclusions. If there was one thing of which Matthew was more persuaded than another, it was that he might with perfect safety to himself and others keep up his pleasant intimacy with Lady Sara and her daughter; and, as he had a spare half-hour that afternoon, he drove straight from Hayes Park to their temporary residence.

He was received by Lilian alone—her mother, as she presently explained, having gone to lie down—and, for all his common sense, he could not but rejoice a little when she upbraided him for having absented himself so long.

'How horrid you are!' she exclaimed. 'Every day I have been thinking that you *must* come at last, and four times have I seen you drive past the door without even turning your head! Is it that you don't care to see us except when we are at the point of death?'

'No; it isn't that,' answered Matthew simply, 'but the number of my patients keeps on increasing, and lately I have had to devote



all my little free time to cheering up poor old Mr. Frere, who has had the gout and has been very sorry for himself.'

'Bother old Mr. Frere and his gout! Though I like you all the better for being so kind to everybody—even to gouty old gentlemen. Do you know what your friend Mr. Jerome says about you? He declares that you have been neglecting us on purpose, lest we should hold the honour of your friendship too cheap.'

'My friend Mr. Jerome says a good many silly things. You have seen him, then?'

The girl made a grimace. 'Oh, yes,' she answered, 'he has contrived to find one excuse or another for dropping in almost every day since we first met. I have heard a great deal about him too—both from himself and from Mamma's friend Mrs. Brudenell, who often comes across him in London, it seems. Evidently he is very much sought after and is fully aware of his own value. He doesn't adopt your system of impressing it upon others, though.'

'Ah, you are prejudiced; you made up your mind to dislike him from the first.'

'No; I like him well enough; only, as I told you, I am not fond of fashionable and conceited young men. One can never feel at one's ease with them, and one is always offending their vanity. However, I will say for Mr. Jerome that he has one redeeming point: he thoroughly appreciates you.'

'Does he? Well, I think I appreciate him too. Fashionable he may be, but I don't believe he is conceited, and as for his being young—all I can say is I wish I had half his complaint!'

'Do try to break yourself of talking like that!' exclaimed Lilian, with an impatient gesture; 'you will be young for another ten years at least, and what is the use of making yourself out old before your time? You go on repeating it until people end by taking you at your word. Even Mamma speaks as if you were somewhere about her own age, whereas in reality you are just about mine. Men are always ten years younger than women.'

Matthew, resolved to adhere to the prudent and unromantic course which he had marked out for himself, was in the act of asserting that middle age overtakes many a man who has not yet entered upon his thirty-second year, when he was interrupted by the entrance of indisputable youth in the person of Mr. Leonard Jerome. Lilian, after giving utterance to an exclamation of

annoyance which was perfectly audible, and was doubtless intended to be so, called out to the retreating housemaid, 'Tell Lady Sara, please'—while the intruder, having shaken hands with her, turned to Matthew and said :

'I saw your cart at the door, old man ; so I thought I would come in.'

'What a very odd reason !' remarked Miss Murray. 'Most people, when they see a doctor's carriage at the door, stay outside.'

'I apologise,' answered the young man, with an assumption of good humour which was not altogether effectual in masking his chagrin ; 'I quite understand that I am *de trop* ; but the beauty of me is that I shall not be *de trop* much longer. I am off to London to-morrow, Miss Murray, you will be glad to hear, and, as I rather want Austin to have a look at my arm before I go, I took the opportunity of killing two birds with one stone by catching him and wishing you goodbye at the same time.'

Lilian made no response ; but Matthew exclaimed, in unaffected concern, 'My dear fellow, this is very sudden ! You haven't been quarrelling with your uncle, I hope ?'

'Not more than usual ; but it is really time for me to be moving on. Can I execute any commissions for you in town, Miss Murray ?'

Lady Sara, who entered the room before Lilian could answer, echoed this query in accents of polite regret. 'In town ? I hope that doesn't mean that you are thinking of deserting us, Mr. Jerome.'

'It's awfully nice of you to put it in that way, Lady Sara,' the young man made reply, 'but I'm afraid I can't flatter myself that my friends here will miss me half as much as I shall miss them. As for my uncle, he has been dead sick of me for a long time past, and it's better to end a visit of one's own accord than to wait until one is told at what hour the train leaves the next morning, don't you think so ?'

Lady Sara smiled. She was not particularly eager to arrange an alliance between her daughter—who might do so very much better—and the potential heir of a well-to-do country gentleman, although she had not felt justified in discouraging what had appeared to her to be advances on Leonard's part.

'I dare say you are longing to get away from this dull place,' she remarked. 'Of course it must be dreadfully dull for you in your disabled state, and when a man can neither hunt nor shoot, he is better off in London than anywhere else, no doubt.'

Some talk upon this not very novel topic of discussion ensued. Lilian took no share in it, and at the end of five minutes or so Leonard rose.

'Have you time to drive me to the Grange and make a last examination of me, Austin?' he asked. 'I was on my way to your house, and I meant to leave a note for you if I didn't find you at home.'

'Come along,' answered Matthew, after consulting his notebook; 'I can just manage it, if we start at once.'

'How tiresome it is of you!' Lilian ejaculated in an undertone, while Lady Sara was telling Mr. Jerome that she quite hoped to meet him again later in the year and in livelier scenes; 'he can't really want you to look at his arm, and I'm sure you can't want to see it! Now it will be weeks, I suppose, before you deign to honour us with another call.'

'I should be here every day, if I could consult my own inclinations,' Matthew answered, with absolute truth. 'And I certainly could not think of letting Jerome escape from my hands without a final overhauling. He is not by any means well yet, whatever he may say. Why he should be in such a desperate hurry to get away all of a sudden I can't make out.'

Lilian shrugged her shoulders. She meant to imply that she was equally ignorant and indifferent as to Mr. Jerome's motives; but she may not improbably have formed some surmise upon the subject, and it is hardly necessary to add that a somewhat similar conjecture had suggested itself to Matthew's mind.

However, nothing in the semblance of a confession was forthcoming from Leonard during the rapid drive through the twilight that ensued. The young man was in high spirits and very loquacious. He said he presumed there was no reason why he should not get on a horse now, and, although he might not be able to follow the hounds, he might go to the meets, potter about the roads and lanes, and see a little of the sport in a country that he knew. If that should prove impracticable, he would manage to amuse himself somehow or other in the metropolis.

'At least one will be amongst one's friends there,' he remarked, 'and there's always something to be done when one is in touch with civilisation. You aren't a native, so I don't mind telling you that I would sooner be shot at once than spend the rest of my days at Wilverton.'

'It is a matter of taste,' said Matthew. 'Personally, I like

the place, and I am quite contented here. So would you be, I dare say, if you were in a fit state for field sports. By the way, it would have been prettier on your part to remember that you are leaving at least one friend behind you.'

'My dear old chap, you don't suppose I forget that, do you? But, as I say, you're not a native, and of course you won't stay here much longer. You are thrown away in a stupid provincial watering-place; besides which, Mrs. Austin won't stand it. I am willing to lay a trifle of odds that, in eighteen months or two years' time at the outside, I shall be doing myself the honour to call at some house in Brook Street or Grosvenor Street which will have your name inscribed upon a brass plate on the door.'

'The brass plate and the house in Mayfair stand upon much the same plane of probability as the Mrs. Austin, no doubt. No; you will find me here, jogging along just as usual, the next time that Mr. Litton sends for you; but I hope that will not be as much as eighteen months hence.'

Leonard only laughed and gave another turn to his companion's thoughts by beginning to talk about his symptoms. The fact was that his injuries had not been limited to a couple of broken bones; so that there was some need for the careful examination of him which Matthew made after they had reached the Grange. At the end of it his friend and physician impressed upon him that for some time to come he would have to keep quiet and avoid making any demand upon forces which were not yet at his disposal.

'If you exercise common prudence you will be as well as ever before the summer; but if you don't, we may have you upon your back for an indefinite length of time. Mind that. I only wish you would remain where you are for another week or two; you can't very well get into mischief here.'

'Can't I, though! If I know anything of myself, I am one of those people who can get into mischief anywhere, and the Devil will have fewer chances of finding work for my idle hands in London than he would here. Oh, I'll be as prudent as you please; I don't want to be an invalid, I assure you! Drop me a line sometimes, will you, like a good fellow? I'm not going to keep you any longer now, because I know you're dying to be off.'

Matthew did not stir. He stood for a few moments, gazing at the other, with a smile which was half-amused, half-embarrassed, and wholly affectionate. He had in truth become very fond of his

muscular young patient, whom he believed—mistakenly perhaps—that he could read like a book.

‘Jerome,’ he said at length, ‘we are not going to part like this; it’s absurd. You know well enough that, when you asked me to drive you home, it wasn’t about your physical condition that you wanted to speak to me.’

‘Good Lord, man! do you imagine that I feel uneasy about my mental condition?’

‘That’s just what I do imagine; and it doesn’t require a very vivid imagination to guess why you are taking to your heels so abruptly either. I think you meant to tell me, in case I shouldn’t guess, why you had determined to beat a retreat, and then your courage failed you, or else, perhaps, you came to the conclusion that it would be better to hold your tongue. My dear fellow, you needn’t hold your tongue, and you needn’t take to your heels. There is nothing at all to be ashamed of in what has happened to you. Nobody knows better than I do that falling in love is an involuntary process, and although I thoroughly appreciate your chivalrous scruples, they are misplaced in this instance, believe me. If you and I stood in any sense upon an equal footing, the case might be different; but since we don’t, you can inflict no injury upon me by staying here and allowing things to follow their natural course. I have no sort of right to propose to Miss Murray, nor have I the remotest intention of ever doing so.’

Leonard burst into uproarious laughter. ‘So that was what you thought I wanted to tell you! You make me out a nice, modest sort of fellow, I must say! So generous of me to retire, rather than cut out a friend who, of course, wouldn’t have had the ghost of a chance against me if I had chosen to stand to my guns! I wonder whether it is possible to persuade you that seeing Miss Murray isn’t of necessity loving her. Perhaps not; but I dare say you will believe me when I declare, upon my honour, that it never entered into my head to make the extraordinary statement that you seem to have expected. I did think of saying something to you about Miss Murray; but it amounted to no more than what I said the other day, and why weaken truth by repetition?’

‘You don’t convince me,’ Matthew remarked.

‘Ask her herself, then; she will soon remove all shadow of doubt from your mind.’

‘That is not what I mean. I mean that you haven’t yet convinced me of error as to your own case.’

'Oh, well, put it as you please, then,' returned Leonard, with a touch of petulance. 'Let us say, if you like, that I am a little bit smitten with your fair friend, and that I think it just as well to lose no more time in turning my back upon her perpetually upturned nose. Even if it were so, there would be no occasion for heroics. I am not like you; I am in a chronic state of being a little bit smitten with somebody, and I can't remember a single instance in which I haven't been cured at once by change of air. Moreover, I am not a marrying man—and don't mean to be until I meet the lovely and accomplished heiress for whom I am always on the look-out.'

There was nothing more to be got out of him; nor could Matthew, who was in a hurry, prosecute investigations at much greater length. The two men parted with mutual expressions of friendship and goodwill; but one of them felt sure that the other had not been entirely candid with him—for which he was sorry.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### COMMON SENSE BREAKS DOWN.

It is proverbially perilous to play with fire; yet pyrotechnic displays are the commonest of diversions, and are not supposed to endanger the lives of skilled operators. If only you keep cool and understand what you are about, your fireworks may dim the firmament without exposing you to any greater degree of risk than is inseparable from existence. So Matthew Austin, having a perfectly clear comprehension of what he was doing, and being in no fear—or scarcely any—of losing his self-control, had a pleasant time of it while the days grew longer and the pale sun stronger and winter began grudgingly to make way for spring.

There were moments when he was fain to laugh at himself—for never, surely, had a man been in love in such a queer, contented, hopeless fashion before, and it seemed clean against nature that he should enjoy the position—but he had very little time for introspection, nor did he often care to indulge in it. Wisely or foolishly, he had determined to make the most of what he felt sure would prove to have been the happiest days of his life, and by making the most of them he merely meant seeing as much as he could of Lilian Murray. To see her, to watch her, to hear her

talk was enough—had to be enough, since it was out of the question for him to betray his love by word or look.

Now, it was not because he had undertaken an obviously impossible task that Matthew sometimes laughed at himself: on the contrary, he considered it well within his powers to go on as he was doing without letting anybody guess his secret, and, as a matter of fact, Lady Sara remained in happy ignorance of it. As for that curious, crabbed specimen of humanity, Mr. Litton, his conjectures could not, of course, be the result of personal observation; so that Matthew was neither startled nor vexed when the old fellow said abruptly to him, one day:

‘I suppose there is no use in my speaking, but I wish, for your sake, that those Murrays would leave the place! Mark my words; you will live to regret it if matters advance any farther between you and the girl.’

A friendship had sprung up between the recluse of Wilverton Grange and the young doctor which had its origin chiefly in a common love of philosophic literature. The former, whose suspicious temperament had at first set him on his guard against admitting a fresh physician to his intimacy, had taken a great fancy to Matthew after satisfying himself that the latter had no design for supplanting Dr. Jennings, while Matthew, on his side, liked Mr. Litton’s library very much and its owner pretty well.

‘Leonard has been talking nonsense to you,’ he replied tranquilly; ‘I have no regrets, and I am in no danger of earning any.’

‘Oh, so you say!—you can’t say anything else, I suppose. Go your own way, then, and get yourself into trouble, like the rest of the world. If women could but be clean abolished, there would be no occasion to cheer people up by holding out hopes of a future state of bliss to them. Only then, to be sure, we should be even less willing to die than we are already.’

Matthew wrote to Leonard Jerome to reproach him for his indiscretion, and received a prompt disclaimer, in reply, from the young man, who added: ‘You have no idea what a sharp old file that uncle of mine is. He knows all manner of things that he has not any business to know; though I will say for him that, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, he keeps his mouth closed. For the rest, you really mustn’t expect your neighbours to be stone-blind—or dumb either. Give them something to talk about, my dear old man; it will be a charity to them and a relief to



others besides yourself. For my own part, I can't see what on earth you are waiting for.'

Not for encouragement, at all events, Lilian having given him as much of that as she could have done if he had been a fit and proper person to become her husband, and if, to use Leonard's absurd phrase, she had 'adored' him. But he was not misled by flattering and affectionate expressions which, he felt sure, would never have been uttered, had not the speaker been wholly fancy-free, nor was he in the least afraid of breaking Miss Murray's heart. That allusion to the perspicacity of his neighbours did, however, cause him some passing disquietude; for it was true enough that in country towns people begin to chatter upon very slight provocation, and he had no business to give the Wilvertonians an excuse for coupling his name with that of his patient's daughter. Accordingly, he gave Prospect Place a wide berth until he was questioned and upbraided, when he resumed his interrupted visits. The truth was that he had never been accustomed to trouble himself about what might be said behind his back, and it was difficult for him to bear in mind always that young ladies cannot afford to be equally indifferent.

Thus the days and weeks slipped rapidly away until the hedges were green, and the glory of the tulips and hyacinths in Matthew's garden was already a thing of the past. It was on a day mild and sunny enough to have done no discredit to the average month of June that our hero, unsuspecting of an impending crisis in his life, betook himself to Hayes Park, in fulfilment of an engagement to lunch with his friends there and meet the Murrays. Owing to one cause and another, he had seen little of Hayes Park and its denizens for some time past, while Anne had become almost a stranger to him. Of her brother he had heard nothing, or he would have made a point of placing himself in communication with her; but he was inclined to think that no news from that quarter might be regarded as good news, and if he had not tried to meet Miss Frere, she had certainly made no effort to meet him. It was, therefore, an entirely superfluous proceeding on his part to enter into apologetic explanations as he shook hands with her, and so she hastened to assure him.

'You aren't expected to drive about the country, paying calls,' said she; 'of course we all understand that your work takes up the whole of your time.'

'Well, almost the whole,' Matthew answered, guiltily conscious

of many spare hours spent in Prospect Place. 'I am not quite so busy as I was, though; otherwise I couldn't have given myself the pleasure of coming here to-day. People are beginning to leave, you see.'

'Yes; isn't it too tiresome of them!' chimed in Mrs. Frere, who had caught his last words. 'One sets the example and all the others become infected immediately—that is always the way, and nobody pities us, poor things, who are left here to vegetate in solitude for six months! Although I must own that I think you are quite right,' she added, turning to Lady Sara, who was seated beside her; 'a girl's first season ought always to be a long one, if possible.'

'Oh, I don't know whether we shall be able to see the season out,' Lady Sara answered; 'that must depend upon circumstances. But this invitation from our cousins to stay with them until we could find a house for ourselves seemed like an opportunity which it would be a pity to lose. Personally, I shall be very sorry to leave Wilverton; the waters and Mr. Austin—especially Mr. Austin—have done such wonders for me.'

Mr. Austin at that moment looked very much as if his patient had returned the compliment by producing a wonderful effect upon him. Although he was well aware that Lady Sara Murray intended to spend the coming season in London, although he knew that the time of her departure could not be now far distant, and although he was conscious of the scrutiny of half a dozen pairs of eyes, he was unable to prevent the consternation with which he had been filled by this abrupt announcement from showing itself in his face. However, if he could not command his expression, he retained sufficient control over his voice to say cheerfully:

'Are you about to desert us, then, Lady Sara?'

'Alas! we are. The letter only came yesterday, and I didn't see you, to consult you, before answering it. Besides, to tell you the truth, I am afraid I should have had to disobey you, even if you had ordered me to stay here a little longer. On Lilian's account, I felt that it would be madness to refuse such an offer. It *does* make a difference, you see, to be launched from a good house, where there are constant entertainments going on.'

'No doubt it does,' Matthew agreed, 'and you might have consulted me without any misgivings. The waters and I have done all that we can do for you. In fact, I believe you will be all the better for a change.'

'Oh, everybody is the better for a change,' said Mr. Frere; 'we all want it now and then. Some of us can't get what we want, though, in this wicked world—can't even get our food until twenty minutes past the proper time!'

He rang the bell noisily just as the butler threw the door open, and Mrs. Frere, taking Lady Sara by the arm, led her out. Lilian, as she passed Matthew, threw him a quick glance, the meaning of which he was at a loss to interpret. It had the appearance of being reproachful, and yet he did not see what he had done to merit reproach. He might perhaps have interrogated her, had he been placed next to her at the luncheon table, but such was not his privilege. Seated between Mrs. Frere and Maggie, he had enough to do to keep conversational step with his neighbours, and although he scarcely knew what either of them was talking about, it was necessary to make continual response to the younger, who had no notion of allowing her valuable remarks to fall upon inattentive ears. From the opposite side of the table Anne contributed an occasional observation, while Mr. Frere entertained Lady Sara with a prolonged jeremiad upon the decay of agriculture, and Dick, home for the Easter holidays, made precocious advances to Lilian, whose beauty had evidently produced a profound impression upon his youthful heart. What would have irritated Matthew, if he had been an irritable person, was the persistent reiteration with which Maggie addressed him by his *sobriquet* of 'the Medicine-man,' and the comments thereupon which Mrs. Frere's kindness induced her to make. 'Physician, heal thyself!' he was thinking. 'I have common sense enough to prescribe common-sense measures to other people, but I am too great an imbecile to smother my own folly, or even conceal it. Everybody must have seen how dismayed I was.'

The worst of it was that this consciousness of having already made an exhibition of himself prevented him from recovering his natural manner. He knew that he was answering at cross-purposes, he knew that his laughter was palpably forced, he saw that Mrs. Frere was looking at him curiously and compassionately; so the only thing to be done seemed to be to get away as soon as possible.

Now, it was not likely that, on so fine an afternoon, Mrs. Frere would suffer her guests to depart without having shown them her daffodils, nor could one of them, when specially invited to accompany her to the lower garden for that purpose, find it in

his heart to plead an engagement elsewhere. As soon as luncheon was over, therefore, Matthew was led out into the open air by his hostess, Mr. Frere following with Lady Sara, and Lilian, to whom the two young ones had attached themselves, bringing up the rear. Anne had disappeared. Perhaps she had come to the conclusion that nobody wanted her, and perhaps she had not been very far wrong in so concluding.

'Ah, well!' Mrs. Frere said, with one of her placid, comfortable sighs, 'one is sorry when nice people go away; still it is often better, for some reasons, that they should go. And one soon forgets them.'

'I dare say one does,' answered Matthew.

'Eh? Oh, yes, everybody soon forgets—especially you, with your work and all your other interests in life. As for me, I haven't much nowadays, except the garden; but the garden suffices to drive my troubles away from my mind for several good hours out of every day, and then I always think it is such a mistake to go on mourning over things that can't be helped. If I could only persuade George to feel as I do, I am sure he wouldn't have the gout nearly as often as he does.'

That was probably quite true; and if our philosophy were not apt to serve us the shabby turn of deserting us just when it is most required, we should be a much more cheerful race than we are. The discomfited philosopher who was gazing at Mrs. Frere's daffodils with abstracted eyes could only acknowledge the justice of her remarks and was not ungrateful to her for her well-meant attempt at consolation, though he was not disposed to pursue the subject farther. Happily, Mrs. Frere had an endless store of other topics, equally interesting to her, to dilate upon; and so the inspection of outdoor and indoor plants went on, without any more embarrassing allusions, until Lady Sara's fly was seen approaching across the park.

'Can we give you a lift?' her ladyship asked, turning to Matthew, or must you rush off somewhere now? If so, perhaps you could look in upon us later in the day.'

Matthew hesitated. He was not obliged to rush off anywhere, and of course he would have to look in upon Lady Sara before long, but he did not quite relish the prospect of the suggested drive. He wanted to be alone for an hour and administer to himself the sharp castigation that he deserved.

'I was thinking of walking back,' he began.

'Oh, then let me walk with you!' interrupted Lilian eagerly; 'there is plenty of time, and I do so hate driving in a shut fly!'

It was the first time that she had spoken to him directly that day. Her eyes expressed a command, rather than an entreaty, which was half painful, half pleasurable to him. 'She, at any rate, doesn't suspect!' he thought. With smiling alacrity, he said what nobody could have helped saying in answer to such a speech, and Lady Sara's consent was readily given. Evidently, Mr. Austin was regarded in the light of one of those safe elderly gentlemen whose society calls for no chaperonage.

A gallant but indiscreet offer on Dick's part to accompany the pair was declined by Lilian with such uncompromising bluntness that the boy fell back in manifest and crestfallen indignation, upon which, no doubt, he was subsequently chaffed without mercy by his younger sister; and so it presently came to pass that Matthew and the girl whom he loved were pacing, side by side, across the grass, with nobody to overhear or interrupt them.

'Isn't it horrid!' Lilian burst out suddenly.

'I don't know,' answered Matthew. 'A good many things are horrid, but not the weather or the landscape or the present moment. At least, not to me.'

'You understand quite well what I mean—our going off to London like this. I thought we should have been here for another month or six weeks, and so did Mamma until these people sent us their tiresome, officious invitation!'

'You are really sorry to leave these parts, then?'

'Does that strike you as so very wonderful? Do you think I am going to enjoy myself or that I shall make any new friends like those whom I am leaving behind me? But as *you* don't care, you are naturally surprised that I should.'

'I never said that I didn't care.'

'No; you only show plainly by your manner that you don't.'

Matthew, who was under the impression that his manner had given unmistakable evidence to the contrary, was very nearly rejoining, 'I am glad you think so.' But that would have been inexcusable; so he kept silence for a few seconds, in order to make sure that he had himself well in hand; after which he remarked, in a cheerful, friendly tone of voice:

'I assure you that your departure will be a very great loss to me; I shall miss you and Lady Sara long after you have both

ceased to think about your country doctor. But it was in the nature of things that you should return to your own world, while I remained in mine. Besides, whatever you may think, you are really going to enjoy yourself and make plenty of fresh friends. Those whom you leave behind you are well aware of that; and they would be selfish sort of friends if they wished to retard you from fulfilling your destiny.'

Lilian vouchsafed no reply to these eminently sensible and fitting observations. They had reached a small copse, through the pale green branches of which the sun's rays fell aslant upon a carpet of spring wild flowers, and at every other step she bent down to gather primroses and blue-bells.

'Do you know,' she asked abruptly at length, 'what those children were talking about to me after luncheon?'

'They were very amusing, I have no doubt.'

'They were so amusing that I longed to knock their heads together. I always knew that you had a great admiration for that cold, immaculate Miss Frere, but never—no, never!—should I have believed that you were actually thinking of marrying her. How you will regret it when it is too late!'

'Indeed I shall do no such thing—and for excellent reasons. You are altogether wrong. I don't call Miss Frere cold, I doubt whether she is more immaculate than other people, and most certainly I am not thinking of marrying her.'

'Well, *they* think you will, anyhow. They are quite eager for the match; they are sure their sister will be graciously pleased to accept you; they have arranged everything——'

'Oh, what does it matter what a couple of children have arranged?' interrupted Matthew impatiently. 'It is all nonsense from beginning to end.'

Lilian raised her eyes to his, with a doubting glance. 'I think it is true,' she said. 'Why do you look so guilty? Yes, I know it is true!'

Even then he might have held out, if the eyes which were anxiously interrogating his own had not been liquid, beyond all doubt or question, with gathering tears; but that sight was more than he could stand—perhaps it was more than any man could have stood. Away went wisdom, prudence and conscientiousness; he had clasped her hand before he well knew what he was about, and was exclaiming: 'Oh, no, you don't!—you know what the real truth is—you know that I shall never marry anyone,

since it is utterly, ridiculously impossible that I should ever marry you !'

Whether, during the next five minutes or so, Lilian convinced him that no sort of impossibility was involved in the matter is uncertain—shortly afterwards Matthew was of opinion that she had not so convinced him—but that she really and truly loved him he could not do otherwise than believe, and such a discovery was enough to drive all other thoughts from his mind for the time being. There are a few, always brief, moments in life when we find out what happiness means, and it would be a thousand pities to shorten them, even if we could, by reflections which are quite sure to present themselves with all necessary rapidity. Perhaps rather more than five minutes had elapsed before Matthew descended from the seventh heaven to the surface of the prosaic planet which we inhabit, and said decisively :

'At all events, I must not dream of binding you. Your mother will have every right to accuse me of dishonourable conduct, as it is.'

'Will she?' asked the girl, who was clinging to his arm and looking up into his face with mingled triumph and humility. 'I don't think she will after I have told her that it was really I who proposed to you, and that you would have refused me if you had had the strength of mind. Of course I ought to be ashamed of myself; but I am not very much ashamed. And you *must* bind me, please, because I mean to bind you. I couldn't go away in peace unless you were publicly and formally bound.'

'Surely you are not afraid that I shall jilt you!' said Matthew, laughing.

'I don't know. I was really afraid of Miss Frere—though I see you don't believe me—and I am not sure that I am not a little afraid of her still. She is so very superior to me, you see!'

'Ah, my dear, that isn't the question. One doesn't fall in love with superiority, though one may easily fall in love with one's superiors. I am a shocking example of a man who has fallen in love with his social superior——'

Lilian stopped him by laying her finger upon his lips. 'I can't bear to hear you talk like that!' she exclaimed. 'In the first place, it isn't true, and in the second place, social distinctions have nothing to say to you and me; we have got beyond them. You are a thousand times too good for me—you know you are

'I can't imagine why you should think so.



'Anybody will tell you why; lots of people will tell you as soon as our engagement is announced.'

And it was in vain that Matthew protested against engagements and announcements. It was pointed out to him, with some show of reason, that an engagement which is not announced is practically no engagement at all, and that, since he chose to speak of dishonourable conduct, nothing can well be more dishonourable than an avowal of love, followed up by a refusal to face the legitimate consequences of such an avowal. Finally, he could only say that Lady Sara's wishes in the matter must be paramount.

'It is almost certain that she will forbid an engagement; I should, if I were in her place. But, whatever may happen, I shall not change; you may be sure of that.'

'You think I shall change, then?'

'I think it is absolutely essential that you should make sure,' Matthew answered gravely. 'You cannot be sure yet; you have seen nothing. All manner of things and people are waiting for you, and you will have to look at them.'

'Oh, I shall have to go through this one season, I know; there is no help for that. Only I want everybody to understand that I am not free.'

Matthew smiled. There was no occasion to argue further against a stipulation which he knew in advance would be deemed—and rightly deemed—inadmissible. He had pleasanter subjects than that to discourse upon during the remainder of the walk to Wilverton, at the end of which, as he could not but foresee, a very unpleasant quarter of an hour was in store for him.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### LADY SARA'S SENTENCE.

'ARE you going to have it out with Mamma at once?' Lilian asked, when she and her affianced lover were standing on the doorstep in Prospect Place.

'Oh, yes,' Matthew answered, with a rather rueful smile; 'I think she ought to be told at once. You must be prepared for a scolding.'

'I don't feel much alarmed.'

'Don't you? Well, I must confess that I do. In fact, I am not sure that I have ever before in my life felt as thoroughly frightened as I do at this moment.'

The girl laughed, as she preceded him up the narrow staircase.

'How funny you are!' she exclaimed. 'Why, what can poor Mamma do to you? Besides, she is almost as fond of you as I am—only in a different way, of course.'

'Ah! that doesn't make things any easier!' sighed Matthew. But Lilian either did not hear or did not heed his ejaculation. She had opened the drawing-room door, had peeped through the aperture and now drew back.

'Go and have your tooth out, while I take off my hat and jacket,' she whispered; 'I will be with you again in time to apply cold water and burnt feathers in case you faint.' And so, with an encouraging pat on the shoulder and a gentle push, she dismissed him to make the best he could of a bad business.

He was very conscious indeed of its being a bad business as he advanced across the room towards the invalid chair in which the unsuspecting Lady Sara reclined.

'So here you are at last!' said she cheerfully; 'what a time you have been! Do you find it too hot with the windows shut? I can't bring myself to give up fires yet.'

'I am hot; but it is with shame, not with the fire,' Matthew answered. 'Lady Sara, I have something to tell you which you will dislike extremely, and which, I am afraid, will make you angry as well.'

The faded, emaciated woman in the *chaise-longue* started forward, clasping her fingers with a nervous, apprehensive movement. In the course of her life she had had to be told of a great many things which she had disliked extremely, although it cannot be said that anger was the emotion to which she had been most frequently moved by the hearing of them.

'What is it?' she asked quickly. 'Have you heard something about my sister, or—or any of the others?'

'No; the trouble is nearer home than that. It is better to speak out than to keep you in suspense, I think. Lady Sara, while I was walking back with your daughter this afternoon, I told her that I loved her, and she—well, I must not say that she accepted me, because she could not do that without your consent; but she wishes to accept me. Now you know the worst!'

He paused, thinking that the right of reply belonged to the

opposition ; but for several seconds none was forthcoming. Lady Sara had drawn a long breath and had fallen back upon her cushions.

'*You !*' she ejaculated at length, in accents of the most profound amazement.

'Oh, I know what a shock it must be to you. You have been deceived in me ; I have abused a position of trust ; I won't attempt to excuse myself. All I can say is that nothing was farther from my intentions this morning than to act as I have done—and there is very little use in saying that now. Of course you cannot sanction an engagement.'

There was another protracted pause, at the end of which Lady Sara said : 'Mr. Austin, do you yourself think that I ought to sanction it ?'

'No, I don't,' answered Matthew unhesitatingly ; 'I should not sanction it, if I were in your place, though my grounds for refusal might not be the same as yours. Personally, I can't see the great importance of conventional degrees in rank ; still it must be admitted that, so long as they exist, they are not entirely meaningless, and I have tried always to remember, in associating with you, as I have done——'

'Oh, it isn't that !' Lady Sara interrupted ; 'I wouldn't for the world have you think that it was that ! Of course your blood is quite as good as most people's, and a great deal better than that of a host of nobodies who are received everywhere because they are rich ; but—but——'

'But in any case, you couldn't allow your daughter to take such a leap in the dark ; you wouldn't be doing your duty to her unless you gave her at least the chance of making some more suitable choice. Isn't that what you mean ?'

Lady Sara supposed that was what she meant. A position so unassailable was, at all events, quite the best to take up, under the circumstances, and she was glad to be spared the painful task of dwelling upon subsidiary drawbacks. She listened tolerantly while Matthew entered upon a more ample avowal ; she had no reproaches to address to him ; she was not, to tell the truth, greatly surprised at his having lost his heart to her beautiful daughter, although the risk of his doing so had not happened to come within the range of her prevision. What astonished her beyond measure was that Lilian should have become enamoured of a man who, notwithstanding all his admirable qualities and the

claims which he had established upon her gratitude, looked and behaved so very little like the subject of a romantic passion.

'I can't account for it,' she said, with touching candour; 'it does seem so unnatural and improbable! But perhaps she may have been carried away by her feelings, poor child, and by the admiration which I am sure you well deserve. She is impulsive at times, as all my family are. Unluckily,' added Lady Sara, sighing retrospectively, 'our impulses are apt to be soon driven out of sight and mind by fresh ones.'

Matthew could only assure her in reply that he had no desire to take advantage of Lilian's impulsiveness. 'I wish her to go away absolutely unfettered,' he declared. 'It stands to reason that that must be your wish also, and I think you have shown very great kindness and forbearance in blaming me as little as you have done.'

'Oh, I don't blame you at all,' Lady Sara answered simply; 'most likely it wasn't in the least your fault. I can truly say that there is nobody in the world whom I would rather have had for a son-in-law, if only you had been richer and—a little more in society. There are reasons which make it necessary for me to consider such things, and I certainly think, as you do, that Lilian ought to be left absolutely unfettered for the present.'

'But *I* don't think so,' said Lilian herself, who had slipped noiselessly into the room during her mother's speech, and who now sank down upon a footstool beside the invalid chair. 'You are very good and wise people, both of you,' she continued; 'only you don't happen to know me quite as well as I know myself. You might give me credit for knowing what I want, all the same.'

'Oh, my dear,' Lady Sara returned, stroking her daughter's copper-coloured hair, from which the flickering fire-light drew gleams of gold, 'nobody doubts your knowing what you want *now*; the question is what you will want six months hence. There are so many things that one begins to feel the want of after one has seen other people in possession of them!'

The discussion went on in a curiously dispassionate style, Lady Sara and Matthew being the chief speakers and being as completely in accord as they were obviously in the right. At length Lilian started suddenly to her feet, and, catching her submissive wooer by the coat-sleeve, said:

'Come into the dining-room; I want to speak to you alone for a minute.'

Matthew obeyed, after casting an interrogative glance at Lady Sara, who made a sign of assent, and as soon as a passage and two solid partition walls had been placed between her and her mother, Lilian began :

‘Matthew—oh, I wish your name wasn’t Matthew; it sounds so ancient and righteous!—well, I must make the best of it, and I think I will call you Mat in future. Mat, then, do you love me?’

‘Is there any need for you to ask that question?’ he returned.

‘Most people would say there was, after the way in which you have been talking; but never mind!—I believe you do. Now, as you love me, as you are a gentleman, as there isn’t a word to be said against you, and as you are well enough off to marry—I suppose you are well enough off to marry?’

‘Oh, I suppose so.’

‘Then there is no reason why our engagement should not be announced, except that you and Mamma think I may meet somebody in London whom I shall like better.’

‘But we cannot announce what does not exist.’

‘The engagement *does* exist; I have your promise and you have mine. Only you wish for secrecy, while I wish for publicity. Mind, I am not asking for anything formal; all I want you to do is just to mention it, as I shall, to a few intimate friends—to Mr. Jerome, for instance, when you write to him, and to the Freres and one or two others.’

Matthew smiled and shook his head. ‘It would be better not,’ he said. ‘Moreover, you must see that I couldn’t possibly do such a thing without your mother’s consent.’

‘She will consent; and even if she didn’t—but she will.’

‘If she does, of course I will willingly do as you wish. But I can’t quite understand why you are so bent upon it.’

‘You will understand still less after I have told you, I’m afraid. Or rather you will misunderstand—which is worse. My reason is that I want to have something real and definite to take away with me. When I can’t see you or talk to you any more, when everything and everybody about me will be so different, I may—I don’t think it is likely; but I *may* come to feel as if all this had been a dream, as if it had happened to some girl whom I once knew, not to me myself. Do you ever have that feeling?’

‘I think I have had something of the kind,’ Matthew answered, keeping his countenance from falling by an effort; ‘but your

reason isn't a convincing one. It is the very reason that I should have given for leaving you free.'

'Didn't I tell you that you would misunderstand? Clever and wise as you are, Mat, there are things which seem to be beyond you, and I am much too stupid to explain them. However, it doesn't matter, now that you have agreed to do as I ask you, so long as Mamma doesn't object. Come and hear me conquer all her objections.'

Not a little to Matthew's surprise, this task was accomplished almost without difficulty. During her daughter's brief absence Lady Sara had reflected, and had arrived at two conclusions: firstly, that the girl's fancy for Mr. Austin was pretty sure to be short-lived; and secondly, that it would be a great mistake to stimulate that fancy by needless opposition. Therefore, after some slight show of reluctance, for form's sake, she said:

'Very well, dear, let it be so. We have nothing to conceal, and perhaps no great harm will be done by our friends' hearing the truth. The truth, of course, is that there is no actual engagement.'

But Lillian demurred to this way of putting things. 'The engagement is as actual as anything can be,' she declared; 'only we are not proclaiming it yet, because you hope, or think, that it may be broken off before next August. If it hasn't been broken off by then——'

'Ah, well, it will be time enough to think about what is to happen next August when August comes,' interrupted Lady Sara. Then she turned to Matthew and said: 'I hope you don't think me a very worldly and ungrateful old woman; I can but do my best according to my lights.'

'I think you have been kindness and generosity itself,' he replied emphatically.

And indeed, during the next few days, she showed herself in many respects worthy of his eulogy. Those were happy days for Matthew, in spite of the parting which was imminent; he was allowed to spend nearly the whole time that he could spare out of them with his betrothed; and Lady Sara, who came to tea with him on the last afternoon, spoke as though she anticipated revisiting his house at no very distant date. It was a delightful and spacious house, she remarked; no pleasanter home could be desired by persons of unambitious tastes.

The fact is that she was not ungrateful, nor was she more

worldly than education and experience had forced her to be. For her own part, she could have been happy enough as the wife of a well-to-do country practitioner—always supposing that country practitioner to be so superior a specimen of the genus as Matthew Austin—but she had her doubts about Lilian, in whom she had long ago detected the existence of certain family characteristics, and she had an exaggerated appreciation of the advantages that belong to wealth. Upon the whole, her attitude towards her would-be son-in-law was rather one of benevolent neutrality than of obstructiveness. The course of events must settle his fate, she thought.

So when he helped her into the railway carriage which was to bear her and her daughter away to the scene of the latter's prescribed ordeal, her leave-taking was almost affectionate. There were to be letters, constant letters, and in case of illness he would be summoned instantly. 'Because there is nobody in London or anywhere else like you!'

As for Lilian, she had bidden farewell to her lover in a less public spot than a railway station. All she had to say to him now was: 'Remember, the Freres are to be told, and other people are not to be contradicted, if they ask questions. Oh, and by the way,' she added, as an after-thought, 'don't forget to write to your friend Mr. Jerome. I think he foresaw what was coming, and he is sure to be pleased.'

*(To be continued.)*



### THE SWEET TOOTH.

HAS it ever occurred to you that the innocent boyhood of the Greeks and Romans knew nothing of the parlous delights of barley sugar or Everton toffee? Sad as it seems in a Christian land to contemplate the fact, whole generations of human boys and girls grew up for ages in utter ignorance of the joys of sugar. The Mother of the Gracchi could never have presented the aspiring Tiberius in his untogaed youth with a pictured box of chocolate creams, or soothed little Caius's first childish displays of revolutionary spirit by the timely administration of a packet of bonbons. Young Plato, strolling down from Athens to Piræus, saw no enticing butter-scotch in the confectioners' windows, in pursuit of which to tease Ariston for an owl-faced obolus. Infancy without sugar is terrible to think upon. We in this enlightened age of School Boards and caramels can hardly realise it. And yet mankind for many centuries and in many nations had no solace to bestow upon its budding members save honey, dried figs, or the fruits of the earth in due season; and what were they among so many? No treacle for puddings, no jam, no marmalade; no sweetening for one's tea, and no tea to put it in! What could Agariste have packed in the half-term hampers she despatched by carrier to the youthful Pericles? What substitute for plum-cake and gingerbread-pudding could have rejoiced the birthdays of Alexander and Julius? Imagination staggers before that appalling void: Fancy herself can hardly paint a sugarless childhood.

Still, the fact remains that up to the Christian era, sugar, as such, was wholly unknown in Europe, and that it has only been common in the western world since the seventeenth century. No wonder the poet exclaimed, 'Alas! poor Yorick!'

Now, what is sugar, and whence do we get it?—to employ the familiar formula of Mangnall's Questions. If you turn to any of the recognised sources of information—encyclopædias, dictionaries of chemistry, *hoc genus omne*—you will learn a vast number of interesting particulars about the origin and classification of saccharoids, glucoses, and saccharoses: their composition and chemical nature, their behaviour towards a ray of polarised light, and their action on that mysterious but unpopular body known as

Fehling's solution. You will also be informed that sugar is crystallisable—a point which you may already have noted in your own sugar basin; and that it is soluble in water, but less so in alcohol—a fact which you will doubtless have discovered for yourself in the manufacture of toddy. You will furthermore become the recipient of a great many curious and minute observations on dextrose and sucrose, as well as on those singular bodies caramelan, caramelen, and caramelin, whose names, differing only in a single vowel, science seems to have invented in a fit of despair, or else to have devised of set purpose and malice aforethought with the object of deceiving the unwary outsider. None of these thrilling disclosures, however, I venture to believe, are of a sort calculated to catch the attention of the general public. What a careless world most desires to know is not the distinction between mannite and dulcite, between melitose and mycose, but how there comes to be in the world such a thing as sugar at all, and how man has learnt to turn its existence to his own advantage. These are the questions I propose to answer in this present treatise, laying sternly on one side those higher matters of 'the behaviour of saccharoids towards the oxides of the alkaline earths,' which too closely remind one of the 'many cheerful facts about the square of the hypotenuse' held in reserve with such admirable discretion by Mr. Gilbert's immortal major-general.

Sugar in all its forms is a body of vegetable origin—in other words, it is stuff manufactured by plants to serve some useful purpose in their own economy. They make it for themselves, not for us: we only steal it. Originally, and for the most part, it is employed by the plant as a food-stuff to build up young leaves, buds, flowers, and branches. Hence it is especially common in roots, tubers, bulbs, and growing shoots, as well as in the sap which ascends to the young foliage in early spring, and which feeds the developing blossoms in the flowering season. A great many plants which have no special store of sugar in the form of nectar or sweet fruits still possess a considerable amount vaguely diffused in this way for future use through their general tissues.

In itself, this particular constituent of sap is not much more interesting than the starches and other bodies with which it is closely allied, and of which it is, in fact, but a slight modification. But while starch is almost tasteless, the crystalline nature of sugar makes it sapid, as we say—gives it a peculiar savour which I need not further describe, as sufficiently known by experience beforehand

to the greater number of my intelligent readers. Now, it so happens that crystalline bodies possess above all others the property of stimulating the sense of taste in the tongues of animals. Hence it comes about that sugar in one form or another is particularly sought after by beasts, birds, and insects. The parts of the plant where it is collected in appreciable quantities are the parts which depredators most desire to lay hands or claws or bills upon. From the plant's point of view, of course, this property of edibility and attractiveness to animals is a distinct disadvantage: no herb or tree desires to be eaten. On the contrary, it lays itself out as much as possible to avoid that fate, and protects itself where it can by spines and thorns and prickles, by downy hairs, by stings like the nettle, or by unpleasant flavours like the buttercup or the camomile. And so, as a rule, we find in Nature that the portions of plants where sugar collects in the greatest quantities are either hidden underground, or encased in hard shells and nauseous rinds, or mailed round with flinty stems, or protected by offensive and defensive armour.

Nevertheless, there are certain ways in which animals, great and small, may be of use to plant-organisms; and wherever this is the case, the plant bribes them, as it were, to perform useful work for it by laying up in convenient places for their enjoyment little stores of sugar. I will not say much on this aspect of the question, because I have already made it familiar to readers of the CORNHILL on previous occasions; but still, for the sake of formal completeness, I must mention very briefly in passing the two chief ways in which stores of sugar are thus specialised for the attraction of friendly animals.

The first case is that of the nectar or honey in flowers. This is a little secretion of sugar, mixed with a few delicate flavouring matters, and laid up by special glands near the base of the petals in order to attract the fertilising insects, or even in some cases the fertilising birds, such as humming-birds, sun-birds, and brush-tongued lories. The insect or bird visits the flower for the sake of the honey, and in doing so incidentally and unconsciously carries the pollen from the stamens of one plant to the virgin ovary of another. The sugar is the wage the plant pays winged creatures for their services as carriers.

The second case is that of sweet edible fruits. Here sugar is laid by in the soft pulp surrounding the grain or seed vessel, and is generally accompanied by dainty flavouring matters which

increase its attractiveness, as in the strawberry, the pineapple, the peach, and the orange. All these fruits are deliberately meant to be eaten: they court inquiry; the plant produces them on purpose to allure to itself parrots, toucans, monkeys, and other fruit-eaters, which devour the sweet pulp, but disperse the hard and indigestible seeds under circumstances admirably adapted to their proper germination. The sugar is the wage the plant pays these allies for sowing and manuring its seeds for it.

Other instances occur besides these in which sugar is laid up in special parts of plants, alike for attractive and protective purposes. Ants are great honey-thieves; but as they crawl indiscriminately up the stems of weeds, instead of flitting direct, like bees or butterflies, from flower to flower, they are useless as fertilisers, because, being attracted by the mere smell of honey, they do not go regularly from herb to herb of a single species, but run about in the most dissipated and inconstant way from one kind to another. They waste their host's pollen in riotous living. The plant, therefore, buys them off, often enough, by a special bribe—in point of fact, pays blackmail to the burglars. There is a common English vetch, for instance, whose stem is beset with barbed, arrowlike stipules, or downward-pointing flaps, which block the way at every joint against crawling insects. In the centre of each such stipule stands a tiny black spot, which turns out on examination to be an active honey-gland or extrafloral nectary. The ants, lured by the sweet scent, creep up the stem as far as these wee black glands and rob them of their honey; but finding their way blocked by the barbed projections, do not attempt to go on to the flowers themselves and rifle them of the nectar laid by for the use of the friendly winged insects. A Central American acacia carries the same wise tactics one step further. This tropical tree suffers much from the depredations of leaf-cutting ants; but it has found out a way to guard against such invaders by transforming some of its spines into hollow honey-bearing domes, intended as nests for their sugar-loving congeners. Little communities of the sugar-eating ants take up their abode, accordingly, in the homes thus provided for them, and repay the plant for their board and lodging by acting as a bodyguard, and repelling the attacks of their leaf-eating relations. I know no better instance in the economy of Nature of an offensive and defensive alliance concluded in due form between plant and animal.

In most cases, then, where we find considerable quantities of sugar conspicuously massed in any part of a plant organism, the sweet juice is placed there on purpose to be eaten. In comparatively small masses, it is stored in flowers or elsewhere for the use of insects. In larger amounts, it is stored in fruits for the use of birds and mammals. And it is these conspicuous store-houses of native sugar that man in the first instance began to seize upon for his own purposes. Himself a descendant of the fruit-eating monkeys, he has always remained to a great extent a fruit-eater. In the tropics, to this day, he subsists largely upon plantains, bananas, mangoes, bread-fruit, and cocoa-nuts, though he also depends to no small degree upon subterranean store-houses of starch or sugar, such as yams and sweet potatoes. In temperate climates, on the other hand, he derives his food more from seeds than from fruits: wheat, rye, maize, barley, oats, rice, and millets form the staple of his diet, while his principal subterranean food, the potato, is starchy, not sugary. Accordingly, his inherited sweet tooth feels the need for sugar—a need which he has endeavoured from all time to satisfy, especially in youth, with dried fruits, figs, raisins, and other like devices.

Till the introduction of cane-sugar, however, honey was the chief source relied upon for the gratification of this prime want in humanity. Hybla and Hymettus took the place now filled by Jamaica and Demerara. 'A land flowing with milk and honey' was the ideal of luxury. And honey is just the nectar of flowers, collected by bees for their personal use, and perverted by man to his own selfish purposes. At first, of course, it was only procured from the nests of wild bees; but with the domestication of the hive-bee man succeeded in pressing into his faithful service whole communities of insect workers, who could gather and condense for him small quantities of nectar far too insignificant and too widely diffused for his own clumsy fingers to garner efficiently. The bees themselves, in turn, obtain different brands from different sources: clover-honey is clear and white; heather-honey, on the contrary, is deep amber-coloured and viscid. It is well known that the bees never mix their liquors; each sticks on each day to one particular species of flower; and I do not doubt, myself, that every cell in the comb is stored with honey of a recognised character. Probably old workers can tell at a sip buttercup-honey from ivy-honey as easily as old toppers can recognise '70 port, or distinguish Veuve-Clicquot from Heidsieck's dry Monopole. In

default of flowers, however, the industrious bee will have recourse to honey-dew, which is mainly the saccharine matter from the sap of leaves, extracted as part of their food by aphides or plant-lice, and exuded by them from special organs as a waste product of digestion. You can find it in abundance on warm days in summer as a sticky and slimy deposit coating the surface of lime-leaves; but the honey made of it is dark in hue and of inferior quality.

Curiously enough, the main modern sources of sugar are not any of these conspicuous and specialised deposits, which would seem, at first sight, the largest and most natural supplies in existence. It will be seen from what I have said that sugar is one of the commonest and most generally diffused among vegetable substances. It lurks all round us. Bees, ants, and aphides can obtain it almost everywhere. The difficulty is that you do not often find it in quantities sufficient for human manufacture. Yet so common is sugar in nature that in dry, hot weather it exudes of itself from the sap of many trees, through ruptures of the tissues due to drought, or through the minute punctures made by insects; and this is, indeed, one source of honey-dew. What is known in trade as 'manna' is in part such dried exudations of the Sicilian ash-tree and of the Australian eucalyptus.

Clearly, a material so pleasant and so generally diffused as sugar was sure in the end to be employed by man for his own purposes. The next point was to discover some form of sap which should yield it direct in commercial quantities. Strange to say, sugar is practically never made in its most natural form of grape-sugar from the grape, the gooseberry, the peach, or the currant. But from time immemorial the manna-ash has been tapped in Sicily and Calabria, and its juice has been boiled down into a sweet substance known as mannite. This body differs, however, from the true sugars in certain technical points, which, with rare consideration, I decline to inflict upon the unoffending reader. A true sugar is similarly obtained from the American sugar-maple: the trees are tapped in spring, when the sap is ascending to feed the leaves and flowers, and it is boiled down in farmhouses into a delicious sweetmeat much appreciated by American and Canadian children. But the main sources of true sugar are of course three—the sugar-cane, the beetroot, and the various palm-trees.

Palm-sugar, or jaggery, which is probably one of the earliest



forms of crystallised sugar known to humanity, is procured from the sap of the cut flower-stalk. By a singular provision of Nature,—very obnoxious, no doubt, to Sir Wilfrid Lawson, but dear to the souls of unregenerate humanity—whatever produces sugar for one's toddy produces also on the same stem the toddy to put it in. Thus the self-same cane supplied Mr. Stiggins with his famous pineapple rum and with the four large lumps which he employed to sweeten it. Thus, too, John Barleycorn, when 'for England's good he yields his blood' in the form of bitter beer, passes first through the sweet stage of malt, in which condition he can easily be converted into the substance known as maltose or malt-sugar. It is the same with palm-juice. When simply boiled down it produces palm-sugar, but when allowed to ferment it turns into an excellent substitute for Bass's pale ale, called palm-wine or toddy. This is, indeed, the original and only genuine toddy, all others being spurious imitations. The name belongs by right to the heathenish Malayan and Indian mixture, and has been imported into Britain by the returned Anglo-Indian, more especially in his commonest and most toddy-consuming avatar as Tommy Atkins. 'Malay beer,' again, is palm-wine mixed with bitter herbs which check fermentation. The British mind regards it with contempt as a very inferior imitation of the genuine article; but then, we must remember that Tacitus described British beer itself as 'corn and water, decayed into a certain faint resemblance of wine.' The sugar-palm of the Malay countries will pour out from its cut flower-stalk several quarts of sap daily for weeks together. According to Mr. Alfred Russel Wallace, this sugar-palm is destined in all probability to replace the cane in the next fifty years or so. It has the great practical advantages that it will grow on the poorest and rockiest soil, and that it can be cultivated with the lightest and most intermittent labour—qualities calculated to endear it at once to the mind of Quashie. A tree which will thrive on acres of waste ground, which will yield the best sugar at little labour or expense, and which is exactly adapted to the habits and manners of semi-civilised people, ought to turn the tables at last on that objectionable and flavourless interloper, beetroot.

Till quite recently, however, the vastly larger quantity of the world's sugar was derived from grasses. Most children know that the tender stem of grass, just above the joints, is distinctly sweet; and this is more markedly the case with the larger grasses, such as wheat, oats, rye, and barley. The bigger the grass, as a rule,



the greater the amount of sugar. Maize or Indian corn contains large quantities of sugary juice in its pulpy pith; and this has often been used (especially in America) as a source of sugar manufacture. The Egyptian durra or sorghum also yields appreciable quantities, extracted for commercial purposes both in Africa and America. The 'cute Yankee is not likely to let sucrose go to waste for want of boiling. But of all grasses the sugar-cane is the richest and most productive of sugar. It is a gigantic reed, allied to the millets, and its peculiarity is that the pith in the centre of the stem is wealthier in sweet sap than that of any other known plant. The main object of this sweet juice is to feed the flower-heads; and the sugar is extracted, as in the palm-tree, at the very moment when the plant is on the point of using it up for this its proper purpose. That is the way of man: he finds out the exact time when each plant or animal can be of the greatest service to him, and appropriates its products, like the anarchist that he is, without giving a second's thought to the convenience of the producer.

The sugar-cane is by descent an Oriental plant, and according to Ritter, who has written a work of true German erudition (and true German length) on this abstruse subject, is of Indian origin. In its wild state it is now unknown; and as it rarely or never produces seed in cultivation, it has probably been tilled from an extremely early period, for plants long propagated by means of suckers seem to lose at last the very habit of seed-bearing. This is the case with the banana and the plantain, both of which, like the sugar-cane, can only be reproduced by means of cuttings; and all three are therefore, like the potato, tending by slow degrees to inevitable extinction. The canes are planted out from the eyes or buds which sprout from the stems; when they are fit for cutting, the annual shoots are hacked down with cutlasses, and the stoles or root-stocks throw up fresh shoots, known as ratoons, in the succeeding summer. Healthy stoles will produce ratoons for several seasons running, up to sixteen or twenty; at the end of that time they must be replaced by fresh buds or cuttings. It is usual to plant the canes in rows about three feet apart; and a field of these gigantic waving grasses, with their vivid green leaves, forms a beautiful oasis in the parched and arid waste of a tropical summer. The greenness, however, is generally secured by artificial irrigation; for cane is a thirsty soul, and drinks with avidity every drop it can lay its roots on.

The plant and its uses have been known in India, its native home, from time immemorial. It is, perhaps, the earliest source from which sugar was produced, and all other modes of manufacture have been borrowed from or based on it. The early classical writers knew sugar vaguely as 'honey of canes.' To the Græco-Roman world the sugar-cane was the reed which the swarthy Indians delighted to chew, and from which they extracted a mysterious sweetmeat. It was the Arabs—those great carriers between the East and West—who introduced the cane in the Middle Ages into Egypt, Sicily, and the South of Spain; where it flourished abundantly till West Indian slavery drove it out of the field for a time, and sent the trade in sugar to Jamaica and Cuba. Naturally, you can afford to undersell your neighbours when you decline to pay any wages to your labourers. Egyptian sugar was carried to London in Plantagenet times by the Venetian fleet, where it was exchanged for wool, the staple product of mediæval England. Early in the sixteenth century, the cane was taken from Sicily to Madeira and the Canaries. Thence it found its way to Brazil and Mexico, to Jamaica and Hayti. Cane-sugar was well known in Italy about the second century, and has been common in England since the Tudor period. The spacious days of great Elizabeth had sugar for their sack; and ginger was hot i' the mouth too, as we all well remember.

There is a common, though to some extent erroneous, idea that sugar-cane as a crop exhausts the soil rapidly and calls for abundant manuring. Practically, from the planter's point of view, this is true; but only because of the curious method employed in sugar-boiling. The ancient Hebrew law-giver forbade his people to seethe the kid in its mother's milk; but the modern planter adds insult to injury by boiling the cane-juice with its own waste fibres. The stems are crushed by being passed lengthwise through powerful rollers, which express the juice and turn out the woody matter like clothes from a mangle. This rejected portion, called 'trash' in the West Indies, is dried and stacked, and then used as fuel to feed the engines and boil the syrup-pans. The consequence is that the entire crop is consumed and taken away from the soil annually. Hence it is necessary to manure the ground well in order to make up for the drain on its resources. But no part of this drain is caused by the production of the sugar itself; for the elements of sugar are obtained entirely from the air and water, and owe nothing in any way to the ground the plant grows from.

If the 'trash' were allowed to rot upon the soil, manuring would be unnecessary. It is the unnatural practice of boiling the juice with its own cane which involves the employment of manure, superphosphates, and artificial fertilisers.

Mr. Wallace has pointed out that the sugar-palm possesses in this respect great advantages over the sugar-cane, for a cane-field is denuded every year of its whole produce, and the soil thus becomes exhausted of the salts and minerals which form part of the woody fibre and foliage. To restore these, heavy manuring is necessary. But with the sugar-palm nothing is taken away except the juice itself; the foliage falls on the ground and rots, giving back to the soil all it ever received from it; so that a plantation of palms will go on supplying sugar from the air and rain for an indefinite period. The plain fact is that carbonic acid and water contain everything needful for the manufacture of sugar; the sunlight supplies the motive-power required for the production, and the leaf of the plant is merely the alembic in which the transformation into available food-stuffs is effected by the incident solar energy.

Thirty years ago, if one was writing of sugar, one would have closed the chapter with the sugar-cane and the West Indies. But of late years an immense change has come over the commerce of the world in this respect. The sugar trade has shifted from the tropics to the temperate zone; and it is that seemingly passive plant, the beetroot, that has headed as ringleader this industrial revolution. Many roots are tolerably rich in sugar; everybody must have noticed its presence in carrots, from which, indeed, it has even at times been commercially extracted. But sugar is still more abundant in the beet, whose juice contains about 15 per cent. of crystallisable sucrose. As an industry, the production of beetroot sugar has a curious history. It originated in France under Napoleon I., when the English blockade prevented communication with Martinique and Hayti. It grew rapidly after the emancipation of the slaves in the British dominions; and being fostered by protectionist governments on the Continent, it is now beginning to drive the poor antiquated and superannuated cane entirely out of the market. Of recent years, by far the larger part of the sugar employed in England is of French origin or 'made in Germany.'

That is one of the reasons why brown sugar has gone out and white sugar come so largely into fashion. For the sweet and

pleasant muscavadoes, produced by simple boiling of the crude cane-juice, could be employed for sweetening coffee, for the domestic rice-pudding, for the use of infancy, and for a great many other simple household purposes. The half-refined moist sugar, commonly known as Demerara, still holds its own for these daily purposes. But raw beetroot sugar displays its origin by an unpleasant earthy flavour; it smacks of the soil too much, and carries with it reminiscences of a somewhat turnipy character. On this account brown sugar has gone out, especially in those coarse and treacly forms which delighted the palate of our unsophisticated childhood. Refining is at present almost universal; and the flavourless, insipid, loose-grained beetroot loaf-sugar, sawn into oblong bricks, has invaded our breakfast-tables. The light moist sugars now so much employed for cooking purposes are refined sugar of insufficient purity to be crystallised into loaves. Cube-sugar, on the other hand, which is so fashionable that it can afford to present the country with new National Galleries of British Art, is made from the most crystallisable syrup, which runs away earliest from the charcoal cisterns of the refineries; but it is specially treated in peculiar moulds, from which the remaining molasses is driven off with rude violence by centrifugal machines. The result is pure grains of transparent crystal.

Sugar, you will thus perceive, is by no means a special or unusual compound. Its raw material exists everywhere in the air and water. It can be easily manufactured by the aid of sunlight, in the leaves of trees, shrubs, herbs, and weeds generally. It is diffused in greater or less quantities through the most various plant tissues. It may appear in root, stem, branches, leaves, flower, fruit, seed-vessel; in grain, sap, pulp, bulb, shoot, or tuber. It is the basis of almost all the sweet things known to humanity. It makes the nectar of flowers, and the honey in the honeycomb; it sweetens our fruits; it is present in most of our edible roots and vegetables. It exists even in milk, and is more abundant in that of the frugivorous than of the herbivorous animals. Man, a descendant of forestine fruit-feeders, feels the want of it in most of his starchy food—bread, rice, tapioca—and supplies the need by artificially producing it from cane or beetroot. This need for sweets is most marked in childhood; and the child stands nearer by some steps than the adult to that 'hairy, arboreal quadrumanous ancestor' whom Darwin has given us as the main trunk in the family-tree of humanity. The child is also more frugivorous and

graminivorous than the grown man and woman ; he learns to be more and more of a carnivore as he approaches maturity. Need I point out, *per contra*, that childhood is essentially the age of lollipops ?

We may note in passing that a taste for sugar has been developed in time among all fruit-eating and flower-feeding species. So also has a taste for bright hues and an advanced colour-sense. Wherever in the animal world you find high decoration and splendid or expanded ornamental adjuncts—as in the butterflies, the golden beetles, the humming-birds, the sun-birds, the toucans, the parrots—you will almost invariably find the species which display them are confirmed sugar-eaters. The love for colour and the love for sugar go hand in hand throughout the whole of creation. The birds of prey, the wolves, the carrion beetles have none of either. They are dull and dingy, or else protectively coloured. Strange as it may sound at first hearing to say so, sugar and the æsthetic sense are bound up closely together. Bright flowers are the coloured expansions which advertise honey to insects ; bright fruits are the coloured pulps which advertise seeds and their sugary coating to birds and mammals. I do not think we can over-estimate the importance of this conjunction. And is it not even a significant fact that our lollipops themselves are rendered more attractive to the colour-loving eyes of ingenuous youth by banded streaks of red and blue and yellow ?

Fruit, flowers, honey, sugar : these form the basis of all æsthetic development.

One word more. Admire my self-control. I have not once mentioned the existence of sugar bounties ! Such reticence is rare. The man who can treat of sugar and yet hold his tongue on the subject of the bounty system might be safely trusted in the most mixed society to avoid saying anything either way on bimetallism.

## *LODGINGS IN THULE.*

### I.

IN the year 18— I was at Shetland for the herring fishing, and one afternoon, when I was but newly risen from a sick-bed, I attempted a foolhardy feat by way of silencing the crew, who were making fun of me for my white face. I knew nothing more till I opened my eyes in the bunk, and saw my brother Joseph bending over me with the tears running down his cheeks.

‘What’s the maitter wi’ ye, Joseph?’ I said.

‘Jeems,’ said he, ‘ye’re lyin’ there wi’ a broken leg.’

They had turned shoreward on my account, and were making for the nearest village in a very surly humour. I was miserable at the prospect of having to dree the days in some lonely cot in Unst when my friends would be gone from the Shetland seas; but, sure enough, there was a ferry-boat on its way to us, and I was lifted to the deck. The ferrymen no sooner heard for what purpose they had been signalled than they muttered sullenly together, and began to put their oars in motion. It was all we could do to get them to argue the matter; nor would they as much as look at me till my brother had shown them a second half-crown. As they rowed me ashore I only saw that one was a grey man and the other a red man; it was gloaming, and my eyes were dim with tears.

For thirteen weeks I lay in the house of one John Thurson, a crofter; and it is what happened between me and that man, and my extraordinary experience as a fugitive on the sea, that I am going to relate.

On the night of my arrival my leg was set by the Free Kirk minister, a sickly man with a muffler of shepherd’s tartan round his mouth. But the next day (which was Sabbath) a little red-nosed gentleman burst into the room, tore off the bandages, and probed about the breakage till I roared. This was the doctor. He had a good dram in him, and while he was doing up my leg he cursed and swore, seldom using the same oath twice. Mrs. Thurson, a big melancholy woman, returned an equal fire of texts, the first that came to hand.

‘I’ll have Dougan at the law, the sneck-drawing devil!’

“Be still and know that I am God ; I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted on the earth.”’

‘Hold your tongue, you fool!’

“How goodly are thy tents, O Zion, and thy tabernacles, O Israel.”’

That was the way they went on ; it was awful for the day of rest in a place like Unst.

For an hour afterwards the woman deaved me with abuse of the doctor ; but I could see that the chief cause of her hatred was that he belonged to the Established Church. As for my leg, she said if I were ever able to walk with a crutch I might be thankful, and the crofter, when he came in, said the same thing. They advised me to get the doctor from T——, one Rose or Ross.

‘What kirk does he go to?’ I asked, winking to myself.

‘The Free Kirk.’

‘I was thinkin’ that.’

They dropped the subject for that time.

My brother Joseph came to see me the day before our boat was to leave the Shetland waters. He brought me my chest, and handed me thirty-seven pounds nine shillings as my share of the season’s profits. I saw the minister passing the window, and heard him going into the kitchen. The landlady called Joseph, and Joseph went out. In about ten minutes the three came to my bedside, and Joseph said :

‘Yer leg’s been bungl’d, Jeems, by that drucken doctor.’

‘Weel,’ I said, ‘that’s possible, Joseph ; but in my opinion it’s gaun on richt enough.’

‘Bungled, bungled,’ sounded from behind the tartan muffler.

‘I’ve sent for the T—— doctor,’ said Joseph ; ‘it’s better to make sure.’

And before I could say a word the minister gave out the first sixteen lines of the eighth paraphrase. As my brother’s voice joined in, I covered my face and wept. During the prayer I fell asleep, and when I awoke all were gone.

After two days Dr. Rose, a genteel young man with watery eyes, appeared on the scene. The first thing he did was to pray. Then, turning down the blankets, he said : ‘Who did this?’

‘Dr. Wilson,’ said my landlady.

Shaking his head, he undid Dr. Wilson’s work.

‘Ay, yes,’ he went on, ‘it’s as well you sent for me.’

So my leg was set for the third time.



The same day, in my landlady's absence, Dr. Wilson came in half-drunk. He looked a good while at my leg, and the more he looked the more he smiled.

'Good-bye,' he said. 'I'm s-sorry for you, my man. Mind, you owe me th-three guineas.'

The last remark gave me a fright at the time, but, as I discovered afterwards, it was a joke. That Dr. Wilson was my friend, and the only friend I had in that cursed village, will presently appear; yet whether he did well or ill for me (albeit I am a living man) I cannot be certain.

Before I got upon my feet it was wearing on to Christmas. For a week or two I walked a bit every day with the help of two sticks, fretting sorely for home, especially when my eye caught some south-going sail. And then I began to think that I was fit to travel. One thing I was resolved upon—that New Year's Day would see me at a tolerable distance from the Thursons. My purpose was like to be thwarted by the frost, which was so intense at Christmas that my thigh ached whenever I ventured out of doors; nor was it owing to any change in the weather, or any foolhardiness in me, that I was quit of the place before the year ended.

The crofter, you are to understand, was a man that made a great show of religion. There was not a night but he held family worship in my room, and he would talk by the hour about predestination, effectual calling, and so forth. Still, I never believed in the man. In his prayers he said that our hearts were deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; yet he himself wished to be taken for a pattern of holiness: and I can picture the rage that would have wrinkled his face had I charged him with any particular fault, such as malice or love of money, which I knew him to be guilty of. He was no man to look at. I was a good head taller even when resting on my sticks; and for the matter of weight, I suppose I could have given him a couple of stone. His face was just a cat's face, hairs and all. Night after night that man would sit at my fireside, trying to pick a quarrel on some matter of religion.

It happened that on Christmas night we had a very hot dispute on the subject of baptism. I asked him at least a dozen times to give me chapter and verse for the sprinkling of infants; and, at last, irritated by the man's preposterous evasions—

'Answer that,' said I, 'or haud yer tongue.'

He was sore put-to, and sat dumb for a while with an ugly

grin on his face. I was quite scunnered to look at him, and wondered that God should suffer such a professor.

‘There’s nae Scripture for haein’ a tank in the kirk,’ he said.

But I was past arguing.

‘Are ye for worship the nicht?’ I asked.

‘To be sure,’ said he.

‘Weel,’ I said, ‘it’ll no be in this room. John Thurson,’ I went on, ‘ye’re a man I cannae thole. Ma hert turns at the very sicht o’ ye,—wi’ yer mooth open, an’ yer teeth glarin’ thro’ spokes o’ white hairs. God forgi’e me! but if the likes o’ you get saved, Heaven’s no the place it used to be,’ I said.

The man turned as white as death, and what was he doing with his hands behind his back? He coughed, slipped something into his pocket, and left the room. From what occurred next day, I make no doubt that he had taken out his gully.

Shortly afterwards, as I was seeking comfort in my hymn-book, a tap came to the door, and in walked my landlady. She lectured me in such a fine strain of sorrow, with so many tears and texts, that I felt myself in the wrong, and had it in my heart to apologise. But suddenly she put her arms akimbo and said:

‘And it’s the last nicht ye’ll sleep under this roof, Mr. Murra.’

She threw a pass-book on the table.

‘There, settle that!’ she said. ‘It’s less than it should be; but yer brither Joseph was a nice man.’

As I was getting back my breath and making to speak, she lifted up her hands and cried:

‘Nae words! Ill or weel, sail or wheel, aff ye go the morn.’

Now that was the coldest night but one of a famous season of cold. Your hands got quite numb if exposed for five minutes. You sat before the fire with your great-coat on: your face and legs would be scorching and your back like ice. The thought of being on the sea next day in an open boat like Mattha Harwick’s made me shudder. How was I to stand the weather, or who would sail me far in a polar frost? There was nothing for it but to beg old David Inkster to take me in till the spell of cold was over. I was thinking thus when the door was opened, and my landlady, not showing her face, bawled out that Mattha Harwick and Tam Inkster were willing to convey me to Lerwick, and that they were in the kitchen.

‘Send them in,’ I said.

Harwick was a fat man for a fisher. He had grey whiskers,

but on his head, which he always kept covered, there was scarcely a hair; you would see the ends of a red napkin sticking out from his bonnet. Inkster was the handsomest man I ever saw; he was about six feet high, and had yellow curls and large eyes of the deepest blue. I gave them a dram, and after a good deal of talk we made a bargain. They were to take me to Lerwick for thirty shillings, and we were to start the next day at noon. I thought them daring men to propose such a sail, but it was not for an exile like me to stick at dangers which they were ready to face for a fare.

And now for the pass-book.

Several times during my sojourn I had asked for my account, but I had always been put off with a laugh or a compliment, and now I was a little afraid of it. I would not open the book till I had made some hypothetical calculations of my debt. Thirteen weeks at five shillings a week, I began—three pound five; so much for lodgings. As for board, having my experience at various places to go by, and considering that the gain from my smaller appetite would compensate the loss from daintier fare, I concluded that eight or nine pounds would cover it. I was thus prepared to see the figure twelve, and ‘I’ll not jump at thirteen,’ I said to myself. No,’ I added, brightening with the thought of home, ‘nor, bedad! at fourteen.’ I opened the pass-book. *The account was nineteen pounds ten shillings and twopence!* My lodgings were put down at five shillings and sixpence a week, instead of five shillings. I had lent the wife sums amounting to thirty-three shillings, and the man on one occasion ten shillings. Only the thirty-three were entered. From Inkster and Harwick I had received sundry presents of fish. These were all charged for, and at pretty stiff rates. But the tale of meat and liquor fairly took away my breath. I sat lost in horror at the moral condition of a man and wife that could swindle the stranger that was within their gates and yet profess the utmost godliness, and that between the cliffs and the heather of a lonely shore.

I burst into the kitchen. There were the two fishermen on their legs, as if about to depart. Mrs. Thurson was clearing away the supper things; her husband was sitting at the fire.

‘What kin’ o’ accoont is this?’ I exclaimed, holding out the pass-book.

‘Well, good-night to ye a’,’ cried Inkster, nudging his neighbour, and taking a step towards the door.

Old Harwick plainly refused the hint; he stood still, wearing

an expression I did not like. I began to pour out my complaint, but had scarcely touched the first particular when the woman, feigning the utmost consternation, drew a long sigh and set up a gabble that might have been heard at sea. With her way of it, I had been thrown upon their hands for their sins (though for what sins they knew not), and all the days of my sojourn they had served me even to the mortifying of the flesh, hoping thereby for acceptance at a throne of grace. She gave me a character that nobody in Buckie would have recognised as 'Giesie's,' and, with her apron at one eye, enlarged on what they had done and endured for my sake, making a fine story, and with the other eye watching the effect on the fishermen. Not a word could I get in, for if I roared she yelled, and at my loudest I was as one bawling in a hurricane. As a sensible man I gave up the job, though to stand and listen was yet harder, when I could have throttled her for her lies and her hypocrisy. Down came my fist upon the table with a report like a cannon. Her tongue stopped; Harwick made a threatening movement, and my landlord jumped out of his chair.

'Staun there an' answer ma questions,' I said to the woman. 'Didnae we agree that ma ludgins were to be five shillins a week?'

'O the lee!' she exclaimed; 'it was five an' sixpence.'

'Ay, five an' six,' said Thurson.

'Ma brither'll hae something to say to that, if there's law in Shetland.'

She was going off in another rant.

'Silence! Hoo much money did ye borrow frae me?'

'I borrowed in a' thirty-dree shillins. Der was dree shillins, an' five shillins, an' twice half-a-croon, an' on the rent-day a pound; an' if ye say I borrowed mair, may the Lord hadd His hand frae strikin' ye deid.'

Thurson was fidgetting under my eye.

'What about the ten shillins I lent yer man the day he went to Lerwick?'

The woman stared.

'I paid it,' said Thurson hoarsely.

Ye paid it! The lie sticks in yer throat, man.'

I dared him to make his asseveration good by giving particulars. My hand was going at the time, and I happened in my anger to twitch his jacket. Instantly he retorted like a wild cat, and but for the scream of his wife, and Harwick pulling my sleeve, there might have been a nasty tussle.

'If ye paid the money, John,' said that honest man Inkster, 'try an' mind the day.'

'Tam, you hadd yer tongue!' said Harwick

'I'm tryin' to mind,' said Thurson, appearing to be in deep thought; and after some inarticulate mutterings he whispered into the coals:

'Was it yon Tuesday?'

'He's preparin' his story,' I put in.

'I paid that ten shillins,' he continued, shaking his head over the fire.

Harwick winced at the exhibition.

'Yer freen's a man o' sma' invention,' I submitted.

The old man gave me a black look, and, drawing himself up, said: 'I've kent the Scotch for forty year, and albeit their country is outlandish, they're a damned upsettin' breed. But it's not a Harwick that'll stand to hear ane o' them revile a Thurson, or the wife o' a Thurson, especially when she hersel's a Baikie——'

'Thou sayest weel, Mattha,' the woman observed, 'save for ae word, which the Lord'll forgie ye.'

'The Murras,' he continued, 'may be great in their ain country, but when they come among the folk o' Shetland they maun learn to respect a better bluid than their ain. In the days o' our faiders this fellow would have been dragged to the rocks and cast into the sea.'

'Yea, doubtless,' muttered the crofter.

'Concernin' the ten shillins, the truth may be here or there, an' nae man a liar; but forasmuch as John cannae show that he paid the money, tak' it aff, tak' it aff, Teenie.'

'Ay, an' what 'll she tak' aff,' I broke in, 'for the drink an' victuals that I never got, eh, Solomon? In this accoont there's bottles o' whisky, an' bottles o' brandy, an' bottles o' wine never drunk by me; there's punds an' punds o' meat that never saw ma stomach——'

'To the rocks with him—to the rocks!' shouted Thurson, springing towards me with hands in the act to clutch, and darting glances between me and his companions.

I looked at the creature, and was inclined to twist his neck; but as he slunk to his seat, abashed by the grave silence with which his outbreak was met, I felt a kind of pity for him, and my anger turned against Harwick.

'This is what comes o' yer blawin' aboot the ways o' yer fore-

faithers. Ye micht have had mair sense, an auld man like you. What have I dune wrang? Was I to say naething aboot the intak? Was I to pay nineteen pound ten an' tippence when I saw as plain as a herrin'-heid that the accoont was swalled up by the maist terrible cheater? Wha was it advised the takkin' aff o' the ten shillins, for a' his blusterin'? Ay, the ten shillins 'll come aff, an' the six an' sixpence 'll come aff; an' what's mair, for goods never consumed an' never ordered by me, a maitter o' four or five pound 'll come aff, afore they see the colour o' ma money.'

With an evil smile and signing to his partner, Harwick moved towards the door. At the same time my landlady broke out with another speech, something about my washing, the hire of a lass Manson, and I know not what.

'O me, me!' she wailed, 'that I should live to see this night.'

'It's the damndest waup that was ever seen in these pairts,' said Inkster.

'Before ye go, you fishermen, I ask ye this: Thae fish that ye gied me, were they praisents, or were they no praisents?'

'Praisents,' replied Inkster, almost angrily.

'They're cherged for to the last fin,' said I.

Knitting his great yellow eyebrows wistfully, he put it to the other in a tone of expostulation:

'They were praisents, Mattha!'

Harwick, looking straight before him, with his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat and a cutty-pipe in his mouth, remained silent.

'Praisents!' gasped Mrs. Thurson, as if ready to faint.

Harwick blew a cloud and said, 'They were praisents'—(He spat, resumed his pipe, and added)—'an' they werena praisents.'

When the chief man in the hamlet could say the like of that, I thought it was time for me to be going. So I marched from the scene, bidding Inkster good-night, and to the others waving my hand, and crying—

'If there's a sheriff anywhere in these blessed islands, I'll see his wig.'

## II.

AN hour later I found myself sitting by an empty grate, with the teeth chattering in my head. I had been lost in visions of uncertain morrows, picturing the fights and shifts and travels that

might befall me yet in Shetland ; and again, forgetting these, had seen away across the dark wintry sea the lights of Buckie harbour and the red lamp of Bell Bowie's inn. Should I pay the money after all ? I knew a crew that could avenge me on the swindlers.

Suddenly my door—it had been off the latch—was blown open, and the blast that came in was loaded with snow. The house-door closed with a bang : Harwick and Inkster had passed out. Fine weather, thought I, for a sail of fifty miles in a wherry ! And all at once I was seized with the suspicion that the fellows, in offering to take me to Lerwick, had counted on our being driven in by the cold before we were long at sea, and I saw myself landed a little way down the coast, or at some adjacent isle, the victim of a trap. Would God I had been of simpler wits ! for then perhaps I had yielded to the sore stress of my situation, and sailed away from those cliffs, though in bitterness, yet not in terror and alone, and reached Lerwick, if not according to the compact, at least without dead men for company. As it was, my back stiffened : I would not have paid my bill to save my life. But with my landlady's 'aff ye go the morn' sticking in my mind, and knowing that every house in the village would be shut against me, I did not see my course as far as another might, let alone the times beyond. I resolved to take counsel with Dr. Wilson at once, and as soon as I heard the sound of psalm-singing, for which I had waited, I slipped out into the storm.

It was no easy job to round the gable, which was to the sea. Blown about and blinded by the snow, I struck against the corner, and had to feel along the wall with my hands. In this way I saw my room through the spy-window. A figure swoops to my trunk, opens it, glances in, locks it, and is gone ! Ay, my money is there, Thurson. They resumed their singing, and I my battle with the storm.

Going all the way with my shoulder to the wind, I did not see the doctor's house till I was at the very gate. Save for a glimmer in the upper story, it was dark. My heart sank, for the doctor's habit was to go to bed in the small hours, and if he was not sitting up he must be either ill with the drink, or away from home. I hung about the spot, feeding my sense of loneliness, and letting the snow freeze in my hair, that I might pity myself the more. Then I remembered that the housekeeper was no Shetlander, but a native of Laurencekirk. Bent on telling my story to Mrs. Gillanders, if her master was not to be seen, I



boldly rang the bell. The door was opened immediately, and there stood the doctor himself. When he heard my voice, he told me to come in; and I was no sooner in the lobby than he pulled me to the light, and just looked at my face.

'Doctor,' I said, 'I'm needin' a freen, and if you're not the man, God help me!'

'Take off that coat,' said he, 'and your boots,' he added, glancing down.

There never was such a gentleman when he was sober, and he was noticeably sober that night. He set me in an easy-chair by the fire, and brought me a pair of slippers. I told him everything; but, though he listened to my words and now and then put a question, he took most interest in the pass-book. As he went through the pages he would smile and talk to himself. 'Kidneys,' I heard him saying,—'kidneys. . . . kidneys. Ay, John's fond of kidneys.' When at length he handed me the book, he remarked that the addition was correct.

'Well,' said I, 'there's no much else correct,' and I was going into matters when the doctor said quietly:

'I'm sorry for you, Murray, but my advice to you is to pay the account.'

'I tell ye, doctor, it's a d——'

'I know. Still, you must pay it.'

He made toddy for us both, and over the glass gave his arguments, mixed with queer stories of the place I was in and the folk I was amongst.

'What have you to expect from a lawsuit? You have no case; you can prove nothing; all the witnesses would be on the other side. Wait on the law, Murray, and it's not nineteen, but ninety, pounds you'll be in for, before all's done. And meanwhile there will be sore times for you. You're not in Scotland, my friend; nor yet in Lerwick.'

After thinking for a while I said, sullenly enough:

'Well, doctor, I'll give the money to you, and you can pay them. To tell the truth, it's not in my blood to pass them their blackmail; I'm afraid of what I might do with that hand. If your lad can give me a lift as far as T——, I'm off to-morrow. And ye may tell them they'll be speired for next season by the Buckie crews.'

'I'm surprised, Murray, at your taking a matter of a few pounds so much to heart.'

‘Ah ! ye wouldnae say that if ye had to depend on the herrin’. But it’s not the money : it’s the imposition—the imposition !’ I repeated, all my anger coming back at the word. ‘I suppose I must submit, but I have a mind to see them damned first.’

And with that I rose to go.

The doctor smiled, and began to stir his liquor absently.

‘There’s one other way,’ he said, with some hesitation.

He was silent for a time. I saw there was something working in his mind. At last he muttered over his glass : ‘It’s a pity about that trunk of yours,’ and, flashing a look in my face, spoke out :

‘You may fly. If you don’t like my advice, there’s my boat.’

I sprang to the doctor and shook his hand, saying :

‘I’ll do them yet.’

As for my trunk, I told him I could put upon my person nearly all that was in it, and would willingly leave the rest as a present to my landlord. After some contention (carried on by the doctor in order to test my spirit, perhaps), we soon found ourselves concocting a plan of escape.

The doctor made it a point that I should attempt nothing till the extreme cold relaxed, as my system had got a shake. The Thursons, he said, had doubtless already altered their vow to be quit of me next day ; they would certainly not let me go with my bill unpaid, and to seize my cash and turn me out they would hardly venture. But he would give orders for my confinement to the house ; and on the first favourable night, leaving behind me so many pounds for the debt, and an additional one for the doubt, I was to take French-leave of the Thursons.

As the doctor was not sure about the condition of the boat, and frost and snow pass quickly off in Shetland, he called in young Gillanders, the housekeeper’s son, who served as groom, gardener, and fisherman. The lad was made privy to the enterprise, and he informed us that, as he had been at the cod the day before, the boat happened to be in the creek—sail, oars, and all.

‘See to it, Peter,’ said his master, ‘and remember where you were born.’

As to the disposal of the boat at Lerwick I had definite instructions.

All things arranged, what with the toddy and the infection of my enthusiasm, the doctor positively exulted in the prospect of my outwitting the thieves after all. When we parted the storm

was over, but the snow crackled underfoot, so deadly was the frost.

I thought I would have perished that night in bed, though I put on one thing after another till I was lying more than half-dressed under the blankets. Do what I might, heat would not come to my body, and the morning was well advanced before I got a wink of sleep. When I awoke it might have been late or early for all that the darkness told, and I might have fallen asleep again but for a great coming-and-going at the front-door. I lit my candle; it was ten o'clock by my watch; and inasmuch as, from the time of my recovery, I had usually taken my meals with the Thursons, and it had been my landlady's habit to call me to breakfast about half-past seven, I concluded that this would be a bad day for me if they got their will. There was one thing I could not do without, and that was a fire. The kitchen was filled with the neighbours; but, after hesitating once and again in the passage, I pushed the door open a few inches and asked Mrs. Thurson to speak to me for a minute. The talking ceased; Mrs. Thurson came out, and, fingering with her apron, followed me to my room.

'Am I to get nae fire, nae breakfast?'

'Ye'll get what ye pay for.'

I tossed her a couple of shillings.

Having gone outside to wait till things were ready, I noticed three or four men hanging about the house. They stamped, and swung their arms across their chests, to keep themselves warm. The company in the kitchen began to drop off, but no one spoke to me. Harwick passed, Inkster passed; they merely acknowledged my existence in the usual solemn manner of the Shetlanders. I could make nothing of all this, except that it boded no good to me; but I was soon to know as much as made me long for the doctor's arrival on the scene. As my landlady was taking away the last of the breakfast-things, she paused at the door, and said:

'About your debt, sir, we had your mind last night, and plenty o't; and if it's the same the day, there'll be a short packin' and a lang hurl for you afore ye lie in blankets.'

So they were prepared to seize my money and have me trepanned in the carrier's cart, and the loungers were for a sentry!

If the doctor would only come!

In spite of all my anxieties, however, I fell asleep over the fire, and, with intervals of dozing, slept for two hours. Twice at least I was visited: at one time I heard my landlady's voice in the room; at another, conscious of a creaking of the door, I knew, just as if I had seen him, that the man-cat had popped in his head. When I woke up the room was almost dark, owing to a heavy snow-shower. I had only to look through the window to lose all expectation of the doctor's coming. Was I to remain at the mercy of my enemies? I tore my hair; I struck the pocket where my money was, and squared my shoulders and set my teeth, mentally vowing resistance to the death; I threw myself on the bench, all but weeping; I walked up and down like a caged beast. But all that was over in a minute. The spies, I reflected, should now be gone to their firesides; at all events, the atmosphere was thick. I determined to slip over the window, and make a dash along the beach for the doctor's house. I put on my great-coat and muffler, and was hastily securing such of my belongings as lay to my hand when there was a knocking at the door! The rogues had doubtless been listening to my movements. Thrusting my bonnet into my pocket, I plumped into my chair. My landlady entered, with her husband behind her.

'Ye seem ready for a journey,' she began. 'Well, there's the door. Try and win to your freen. Maybe there's nae honest men roon the corner to catch the thief.'

The woman was too clever for once: I divined in a moment that the watch was gone.

'Journey! It's the cauld,' said I, bending closer over the fire, and pretending to shiver. I had meant to feign a broken spirit, and as much more as was needed to put them off their guard; but, taking exactly the opposite course by a reckless impulse, I added: 'I'll tak' aff ma coat when I hear ma murderers at the door.'

The pair exchanged looks. After a pause, the wife went into the kitchen, and the other spoke:

'What kind o' talk is that, man? There'll be nae murderin' in this hoose. I'll no alloo it.'

'Ye draw the line at assault an' robbery?—not even there.' I muttered to myself, 'I forgot I was to be flung into a waggon.'

While I was speaking I took up the poker, weighed it in my hands, and laid it across my knees.

Mrs. Thurson returned, bringing me a great bowl of mutton broth and some rye scones. But from her speedy retreat, I sus-

pected that her purpose in this hospitality was to gain time to communicate with the hamlet. I fell-to with might and main, pleading the cold as my excuse. Presently the cottage door opened and closed, but had I not been listening intently I should not have heard it, the talebearer went out with such caution. My heart beat violently, and the blood mounted to my face. Thurson sat on.

‘If you and I are to hae a crack,’ I said, ‘come ower to the fire.’

He took his old place on the bench. Between mouthfuls I talked to hide my excitement, saying one thing and another to conciliate my keeper; and when I judged that the moment had come, I rose slowly from the table, stumbled towards the door as if in the act of stretching myself, and, with the remark ‘I’ll just step oot an’ see the weather,’ lifted the latch, intending to run for my life.

Oh, the pride and folly of a young man matching himself against the odds of circumstance, and incurring terrible chances, for a comparatively trivial cause! How it all came to pass I cannot tell; but I was felled by the leap as it were of a tiger, two bodies writhed together on the floor of the entry—a knife swaying in four blood-wet hands; and there was my landlord, still as a corpse, his own gully sticking in his ribs!

I stood dazed with horror, staring at the lodged weapon and the rigid face, and uttering moan on moan. Then what a start I got!—the man was looking at me! The next instant I was on my knee, bending over him.

‘O John! speak to me, John!’

Making a fearful face, ‘Ugh!’ he groaned, and with a jerk the knife was in his hand. How it ran blood!

Raising himself on his elbow, he tried to make a lunge at my heart. The knife dropped; and the last that I saw of John Thurson was his bald head sinking on the cold stone, and a grey lock dipping in a pool of blood.

### III.

I can say before God that when I took to my heels my only clear intention was to inform the doctor; but once hearing sounds as of a woman summoning the world with shrieks, I grew wild with terror, and, weak and sore as I was from the fight, dashed over rock and boulder for the beach, shouting to young Gillanders, who was standing at gaze on the road:

‘The creek ! the creek !’

The lad was there first. What they called the creek was a large cave so deep in water that a boat could float in it at ebb-tide, and curving in such a way behind the buttress of the cliffs that it was out of the swirl of stormy seas. Returning nothing to Peter’s questions, except some words of caution for his own safety, I bade him bustle and get the craft into the open. This he did with all dexterity and speed, while I retraced my steps along the ledge of rock to the mouth of the cave. There, when the mast was fixed, we exchanged positions (not without gold passing from my hand to his), and crying farewells to my fleeing pilot I began to pull out to the deep. I had several cuts in my hands from Thurson’s knife, and, as I struggled on, a blur came over my sight, so that I dared not hoist the sail (the coast being noted for its dangers); and I would sit for a minute at a time, rubbing my eyes and taking in my position. At one of those intervals I happened to see, through an opening in the cliffs, a number of men, one after another, running in the direction of the doctor’s house. I made a jump for the sail, dreading nothing but those men’s hands; and as I was fumbling and stumbling at my job, I heard the cries of my pursuers, who were rushing down to the shore, and anon stood yelling at me from the water’s edge. Mad hurry made me worse than blind, and there I was, ever striving, ever failing at the ropes—the angry canvas fluttering thunders about my ears, the wide sea before me with jets and ridges of white in the distance; behind me fatal rocks, raging enemies, and that dead man! I stopped to bethink myself, and wakened as from a nightmare. What was to hinder me from putting up that sail? It only needed a little coolness and the thing was done; and fierce was the howl from the land when the sail filled and the boat sped away.

Before I cleared the Skerries I had anxious moments, but once fairly off I burst out roaring and singing like a drunken man, and it was not till I caught myself in the middle of a certain ribald chorus (which I had never before breathed, and had always objected to) that I realised the ghastliness of my hilarity. When the fit was over, the sudden silence, broken only by the sound of the water lapping against the boat, brought me to my senses with a shock.

What was I doing there, away out on the sea, sailing in that cockle-shell on a winter’s afternoon? I was he that sat the night

before at the doctor's hearth, the very same man. If I struck a fellow-creature to the shedding of his life-blood, it was a blind blow in the heat of self-defence; and whose blame was it that there was a knife in the affair? I was no murderer to go fleeing from the face of man. Whither bound, O steersman? Put about and return to the creek. Knock, James Murray, at the doctor's door.

The coast was a white line in the dusk of sky and sea, and behind it was the sun—a mere patch of blood-red mist. As I gazed, the sudden recollection of my unpaid bill added to my horror of a shore where a man lay stabbed by my hand. And what were those pale lights that flashed and twinkled on the beach? They must be torches and lanterns in the hands of the villagers. I watched them till they disappeared, and before I turned my eyes away there shot into my field of vision a brown sail! At that I gave a sudden jerk to the tiller and held out to sea. It was a desperate course for a man in an open boat, in the worst of winter weather, and without either water or victuals. But what was I to do? With pursuers on my track Lerwick was no place for me. If I was to escape from Shetland it would not be by the steamer, but in that same cockle-shell. There was a chance for me if I could get landed at some out-of-the-way village, where I might pass the night, and whence on the morrow I should start for Orkney; and there was the hope of deterring my pursuers, who might not be willing to follow me far on the way, as it seemed, to no shore but death.

The horizon all round was one steep wall of grey and purple, within which the sea rolled black, with flashes of foam. The wind that sent my light craft flying was icy, piercing to the bones, numbing the hand at the tiller, and making my cheeks and ears smart as with pricks of steel. In my corner at the stern I sat drawn tightly together, and as my eye travelled between the pursuing sail and the dim shoreless verges beyond my plunging bows, a lone man on the ocean, fleeing from avengers, I lived in a wild dream, vaunting myself another Cain. Ah not for me, the customary round! Others might carry on the fishing, and bring up families, and go to the church; but I had always that within which told me I should burst my bonds and be hurled into the unknown, a dark wonder to my tribe! Theirs that winter night to sit around the fire with cheerful looks; mine to be out among the spray of the far North seas, a prisoner or a



corpse! Away! good, comfortable souls! For me, I was with those on whose heads a price was set, and I saw, as flashes in darkness, the fear-drawn faces of my brother outlaws, flying on country roads, over moors, through city lanes and alleys, before chasing lanterns. Exulting in a common plight with these, I turned my bow still farther away from land, and, more like a demon than a man, sped on for the cloudy gates, shouting to the waves 'Ho! ho!'

I woke up, thinking I heard answering cries from my pursuers, and was startled to find that, with all my seeing, I had noticed their progress no more than if I had been in a trance. Fearful it was to me, that black mark growing in the gloom! They were now not above a mile away, and were bearing down at such a rate that I gave an involuntary heave to my shoulders, imagining hands at my collar. At the same time I was appalled by my outlook; in the direction in which I was going death stared me in the face. I began to fetch a compass landward, trusting to hold my own till the darkness should blot out our sails; and for a time my sufferings both of body and mind were forgotten in the excitement of the race. The cries came ever and again with terrifying distinctness, and there were breathless minutes when I felt as if some monstrous bird of prey were about my very head; but what with the better boat, and more skill at the tiller, I slipped from their clutches and steadily gained distance.

The night was dark, only from time to time there was a vague glimmer abroad, telling that there was a moon somewhere; and now there was no difference between sea and sky, and now there was a sail for a sign.

After a two-hours' run it was not capture I had to fear. The wind had risen, carrying flakes of snow, sharp and dry as powdered ice. The back of my head was as if grasped in an iron clamp; my hands were become powerless—the one at the tiller (though rolled in a handkerchief) being frost-bitten all over, and the other swollen with cold and wounds. There was the promise of a terrible night, and I was so far to the south-east that, with Fetlar Island cut off by the chase, I had no alternative but to make for Whalsey. It was a race against death, and never did my bloodguiltiness appear in such awful reality as when I thought of those men being free to put in at Fetlar, where they might have a good fire, a hot supper, and a bed to lie in, yet preferring to hunt on, in cold and darkness, over the deep.

When I found myself alone, it was woe to look upon the black

desert of waters, with its sudden ridges flaring white. Even the furrow cut by my little boat was a sight that made me quake. Sounds I had never heeded in my life before—the creaking of ropes, the flapping of canvas, the splash of spray, the chuckle of the waves about the boat's sides—grew to be awful in my ears. Once I started up, hearing a dull thud in the sea. There was another, only more distinct. My heart beat fast, the perspiration broke out on my face. Suddenly there was a grunt and a hollow roar, accompanied by a crash and running of waters, and a whale disappeared beyond my bows. Thereafter through the eerie hours I thought of what was below the waves, swimming, swimming,—enormous bulks and fiercesome shapes, with all their slimy battles, and never a voice nor sound. I would sit in a kind of fearful enchantment, conjuring up unknown sea-monsters and searching the dark for glaring eyes. Or I would be haunted by dreams of my landlord lying in his blood, of my friends at their hearths at home, of the prison, of endless wanderings. All the while, I was perishing with cold. At last I wept like a child, breathing 'O mother! mother!' I prayed, and after long agony saw in my mind, against a twilight sky full of white stars, the cross, and heard a choir softly singing—

They looked to Him and lightened were,  
Not shamed were their faces;  
This poor man cried, God heard and saved  
Him from all his distresses.

So I came within sight of the coast-line of Whalsey, and to me no prospect of time ever seemed so long as the hour I must yet dree on the water. I had no hope nor thought for this world but just to set my foot on earth. Yet I was to be denied a shore, even to rest my eyes on. The faint shine that was in the clouds went out, and the whirling spit became a regular snow-storm. I looked abroad—there was no sea, nothing but grey-thickened darkness, and within it, as it were, a furious pool. If I turned my head, the snow that was dashed in my face burned my eyes like pepper. Holding the tiller in my arm-pit I bowed myself, and just sat to the snow like a stone in a field. It came upon me that every man had his fate, and here was mine. In a vision I saw, through a screen of flying flakes, a small boat sailing on a pitch-dark sea, and at the stern a figure covered up as in a winding-sheet. That was James Murray, and he should never see land again, but be a fear to someone wandering by a shore, or a sight to some ship.

Then those thinking long at home should hear of me. My mother would sit wringing her hands at the fireside, with the women about her, and Joseph would have a set face of grief, and a lower voice among men. But my own folk and many besides would speak up for 'Giesie.' Oh they would sing the burial hymn, and there would be wails from the women and tears on the cheeks of the men when the chorus rose: 'For his Father has called him home.'

My left foot began to ache as if squeezed in a vice. I started with a cold stream trickling down my back, and found I had been on the point of falling asleep. I could not see my direction, and just went with the wind. My eyes would close, and stare ahead, and close again, and always I heard the noises of the boat, and felt the beating snow. I remember hearing the tiller bang. . . .

Next moment it is an umbrella that has fallen in the pew. I am sitting in the chapel at home. At the top of an open window the blind is flying in and out with a continual clatter. The folk are taking their places. Above me the gallery resounds with the rumble of heavy boots. My eyes follow particular persons in the throng, and, when all are seated, each familiar face is where I expect to see it. The bustle made by a woman among her children attracts attention, until the tailor, in all the dignity of broadcloth and creaking boots, marches up the aisle. In one part of the chapel a tumult arises. I come to know that a stranger is there who refuses to uncover his head. It is Mattha Harwick, and he is going up to the pulpit. He wears a broad bonnet, from under which hang the ends of a red napkin. He speaks, but I cannot hear a word for the clamour. Yet I know he is scoffing furiously at the people. I sit shrinking with vague terror. Now he is holding out over the pulpit Thurson's dead body. The tailor stands up and says, 'I rise to a point of order; the blood is dripping on the harmonium.' 'Ye can bury him, then,' roars Harwick, swinging his burden in the act to throw, and as the people babble and the blind thunders and the whole scene whirls, the corpse comes flying in my face, and I am sent rolling in the crash of things.

#### IV.

When I awoke I was sprawling in water, which was pouring in at the bow, and the boat was turning. As by painful stages I was getting to my feet, shiny black rocks reeled out of sight, then a dim shore swept past, and I was facing the sea. I looked behind,

and was just in time to scramble out as the stern struck. One moment my cheek was upon the wet stone; the next I was crawling away on my hands and knees. There were detached rocks all about, but I was on a ridge that jutted from the land. It was a rough road I had for my sore and shaking limbs—a dyke of boulders and big stones, in some places with seams of sea between, and so full of little hollows and sharp points that almost with every movement I had to choose the spot on which my arms could rest. Sometimes I came down with my forehead on the rock, sometimes lay still, looking at the water or peering into the shadow of the lofty shore. How long my pauses may have lasted I know not, but once I caught myself watching a crab winding through a labyrinth of weeds. Of my past and future I had scarce a thought; my life consisted in sensations of pain and weakness, and the perception of rough and smooth, safe and dangerous, over weary inches of stone. At length instead of water there were pebbles. Raising my head, I looked into the dark mouth of a cave. My legs would not bear me, and I went crawling up the beach, like a wounded beast seeking only a den to die in.

What comfort to feel the soft earth under me, and how strange to be in quiet air and to hear an echo when I coughed! Getting well in to be out of the wind, I came upon a heap that was to the touch like dry heather, and there lay down in dire distress of body, yet grateful in my heart to God. Slowly the agony and trembling of my limbs subsided; but I no sooner found a kind of ease in my bed than I began to feel that I might fall asleep and never wake. For all that, it was long before I could summon resolution to bestir myself. I got out the old metal snuff-box in which I kept my matches, being in such darkness that it was rather by the stream of air and the sound of the sea than by any hint of colour that I knew the opening of the cave; but match after match, as I made to strike it, dropped from my half-dead fingers. Then I tried to walk, leaning against the wall. My knees gave way under me and, as I shuffled along, acute pains shot through every bone and fibre of my feet. Still I held on, taking so many steps for an imaginary wager—and that time after time—till I was able to walk without the support of the wall. By-and-by I carried an armful of the heather to some distance from the main heap and succeeded in lighting a fire. While eagerly I gazed at the kindling twigs and caught the heat in my face and hands, I was aware of great grim walls, fantastic pillars and mysterious corners,

and thought of the open door and the sea beyond. Beside me was an old oar with one end charred and lying in a circle of ashes, and I had only to lift my eyes to be assured of plenty of fuel, the floor being strewn with the timbers of a wreck. I found also empty bottles and paper bags. Here excursionists had been; but upon what shore had I chanced? Stripped to my guernsey and with my sea-boots off, I suffered little from the wet, and, having spread out my things to dry, I lay down in the heat, with my face screened from the smoke.

I knew no more till I found myself in pitch darkness, sitting up, the cold in my marrow and the sweat on my brow, while the air rang with the awful echo of my own voice. One long minute of inexpressible horror elapsed before I could remember where I was. I got into my great-coat and groped my way to the mouth of the cave; but it was not till I had been for some time out under the sky that the terrific images of nightmare relaxed their hold upon my mind.

Not a star was to be seen, nor was anything visible beyond the beach save black spectres of rocks and the moving sea. After a breath of the open, I was forced by the cold to return to my heather. I could neither sleep nor rest, and was too feeble to set up another fire. Time after time I tottered to the beach, but there was never a glimpse of morning, and back to my bed, only to know the worm that dieth not.

Once, as at the flash of a lantern, I opened my eyes. The sun had come.

But there was no rushing out to see what shore I had been cast upon. I must have been asleep for hours, such a change had come over my condition. My bones were stiff as from the blows of a hammer, and I was so weak withal that, though trembling with cold, I had little will to stir. Half unconsciously I struggled to my knees; and with but dreamy eyes for the opening prospect I crawled to the mouth of the cave.

Suddenly against the red dawn, where it glared through a loop-hole of the rocky coast, appeared the black horror that had dogged me on the deep—Harwick's sail! My heart quaked with awe; for how came those men there, thought I, if not by a supernatural hand?

With one deep groan of pain I was on my feet. Staggering out I saw, a few miles to the north-west, an inhabited island adjacent to an indented coast-line. These could be no other than

Whalsey and the Mainland. I had only to clamber up a cliff to see the ring of foam around my desert rocks. If the cave was not to be my sepulchre, I must go with yonder men.

But what was the matter? Towards the point where I was wrecked the boat was sheering and jibing. Harwick's bald pate appeared above the gunwale; Inkster was in a corner of the stern, his yellow beard buried in his breast. I ran down the beach and out upon the ridge, hailing the men. There was no answer. I dashed through the water, and missing the gunwale, caught the rudder rope and got aboard; all without word or sign from the crew. Sick and dizzy, I struggled in beside Inkster, and with a groping hand touched the tiller. Then the light went out of my eyes.

When I came to myself I was lying half over the boat, choking with spray and crushed under the weight of my neighbour. I caught him fast and called to him by name imploringly; but getting a glimpse of the face that hung above me, I loosened my hold with a scream, and wriggled out of his clutches. Oh that ghastly pallor mingled with patches of dusky red! Oh those unwinking blue eyes! Harwick was reclining against the side of the boat, with an arm over a seat and his face to the sky; the mouth was wide open, the bald head all wet and shining. Fixed in terror, I lay on my face, and the waves raged around us, and the spray fell in showers, and again the sail clattered as the boat came to the wind. Thinking that the men whispered together and were about to fall upon me, I started up with a yell. Harwick seemed to be looking at me from under his eyelids, and Inkster's lips were set in a smile. In a sudden frenzy I threw myself on one and the other, shaking them and speaking loud in their ears. As suddenly I recoiled, and edged away towards the bow, where I sat moaning and casting scared glances at the still figures. The gold of morning was gone like a flash. Oh, it was pitiful to see the sleet dropping on the old man's face.

For all my terror I was not slow to break my long fast; but it was with my eyes ever on the men that I ate and drank. Dreadful as they were to behold, I durst not let them out of my sight, especially when their liquor was at my lips; for I could not help thinking that, alive or dead, they were aware of my presence. Once I let the bottle fall, as I heard what sounded like a cough from Inkster; and I was still alert and gaping when he came rolling against his partner, and there, cheek by jowl,



were the red head and the bald ! At that I laughed wildly and wept low by turns.

When the hysterical fit passed off I became conscious of a lowering sky and lashing seas. The boat, hitherto driven by wind and tide, had come perilously near the land, and was running before the gale at a great speed. The necessity for action cleared my mind, insomuch that I not only took my place at the tiller, but sat with an eye for my course alone. With such a wind, if all went well, I should make Lerwick in a couple of hours ; and thither I resolved to steer my weird freight, come of me what might. But as the boat went splashing through the surge, how the frozen men tumbled and slid ! Before long poor Inkster's curls were soaking in the lee scuppers, while the smooth skull of the other, dangling over the gunwale, was washed by the waves.

A sea swept over us, rousing me from a trance of horror. I had ceased to steer, and was now close upon the shore. Filled of a sudden with the idea of getting quit of my companions there and then, and strengthened by whisky and desperation, I hauled in the sail and took to the oars. At length, seizing my opportunity, I flung myself out upon a shelf of a cliff. Without resting a moment I crept along to the beach, ascended a grassy slope, and hurried on to a turn of the road. Not till then did I look back at the boat. The tide was carrying her out to sea.

At dusk I came to a village at the head of a bay. The folk were lighting their lamps, and as here and there the dim stars of gold appeared, such thoughts arose in me that my eyes streamed with tears. Few of the inhabitants were out of doors, but all that passed stopped and stared at me ; and it was with a small crowd at my back that I made my way to the inn. I went straight to a room, and sat down before a blazing fire. The landlord, coming in at my heels, damned me for a street-singer, and ordered me to the bar ; but when he saw my face he was silent. In a hoarse whisper, which was all the voice I had, I said I was a shipwrecked man, and asked for ham and eggs and a bed for the night, laying a pound note on the table to show that I was no beggar. The next minute (as it seemed to me) I felt myself violently shaken and heard loud calls ; and there was the landlord holding a glass of brandy to my lips and a woman taking off my boots. They had me into a bedroom, and provided me with a complete change of clothing. When I



was at supper one or other would come in to see to my welfare, and hear more of my story. All the news was carried to the bar, which was thronged with seafaring men; so for fear of an inquisition I hurriedly escaped to bed.

Next day, early in the forenoon, mounted on a farmer's dog-cart, I left the inn. The whole night long I had been sleepless and miserably ill. During the drive I was in a sort of stupor. At the sudden jar of the wheels as they rolled on to the causeway of the capital I woke up, and my heart began to faint and flutter with a manslayer's fears. There was a drizzle of rain from clouds that touched the steeples, and the dimness was such that in many of the shops and houses lights were burning. I had to turn away my face to hide my emotion, remembering a certain autumn evening when the bay, the shipping, the churches were all golden, and we sailed into the harbour singing songs.

I was set down at a hotel in the market-place among groups of farmers, and was no sooner on my legs than I sank to the ground with weakness. It was with difficulty that I got away from the kindly hands that came to my help. Apparently there was nothing publicly known about a murder in Unst; but the news should be on the road, and might even now be ringing in official ears hard by. My purpose was to go to the police-station, but my feet would be to and fro, and never just at the door. At one minute, thinking of the roguery of the couple and that man-tiger springing at me with a gully for a claw, I would make for my goal with a kind of angry pride; again, when I pictured the grey head lying on the bloody stone, I would turn into any obscure passage in a state of abject terror.

All the while I was going with bowed back and tottering limbs like a frail old man, and suddenly I was seized with a sharp pain that caught my breath. I might have died in the streets but for a woman calling to me as she passed:

'What are ye daein' there, sittin' in the rain?'

I rose from a door-step, and went on my way wailing, 'I maun get hame, I maun get hame.'

The next thing that I remember was my standing at the counter of a bank. The teller, who seemed far away in a kind of mist, was questioning me in loud and angry tones. I was holding a bundle of notes in a trembling hand. At last he caught the name I had been hoarsely murmuring, and as he repeated the words 'John Thurson,' my blood ran cold.

'The amount?'

'Thirteen pounds.'

A chair had to be brought for me, and soon there were two or three of the officials by my side. I was put into a cab, and before I knew rightly what had happened I was on the quay, and crossing the gangway into the Aberdeen steamer. Being recommended to the steward by the lad that accompanied me from the bank, I was at once conveyed between two of the sailors to a berth in the cabin.

How my heart bounded when, after a time that seemed endless, I heard the signal given! But just as the boat was moving the captain knocked again. The engine stopped. There was a mysterious silence, broken only by the rushing of feet and the subdued murmurs of a crowd. As I sat up shaking with fear, expecting every moment to see the police at the door, the boat with the frozen men, towed by a schooner, went past my little window. I fell back upon my pillow; and when next I opened my eyes a lamp was burning in my berth, and the vessel was speeding on its way.

During the voyage I was treated in the kindest manner by the captain and the steward, and when we arrived at Aberdeen they lost no time in sending me to the Infirmary. On the third day my brother, who had been summoned by the nurse, appeared at my bedside. He had received a letter from Dr. Wilson which contained the blessed assurance that Thurson was not only alive, but certain soon to recover from his wound.

## DRESS.

If we begin at the top, and take a turban as the first word in our text, we realise at once that in attempting to review some thoughts about 'dress' we approach a question which not only concerns fashions of manifold fitness and variety, but suggests much that is perplexing and seemingly irrational. The turban is the head-gear of millions who are specially exposed to solar heat, and its thick folds are assumed to be their best protection against the rays of the sun. It is not worn by the Laplander. We might naturally conclude that it illustrates a survival of the fittest among hoods which are suited to a hot climate, and shows the good sense of the Turk, who, in the eyes of the world, is the representative turban-wearer. It certainly gives dignified completeness to an Oriental dress, and perhaps unconsciously suggests the ownership of more brains than are contained in the skull which it covers, since the impression it creates is felt to support the claims and character of the wise man and the prophet. At the same time it has two obvious defects. It is made by folding abundant material around a 'fez' (the basis of the structure), which is nothing else than a close-clinging unventilated cap of thick cloth. Thus it is inevitably so hot as to involve the shaving of the head before it can be worn with comfort. Then, too, it fails to shade and cover the nape of the neck (which is peculiarly sensitive to the rays of the sun) except, indeed, in those places and at those times when they are perpendicular. Possibly, however, the turban owes its use partly to its ritual convenience. The praying Turk repeatedly touches the ground with his forehead. Now, as he puts off his shoes, not his hat, when at worship, a stiff brim would be obviously embarrassing, but the soft folds of his turban lend themselves to these devotional gestures, and may even save the head of the enthusiastic devotee from being unexpectedly bumped.

I need not say that many other accepted 'fashions' are open to similar criticism. The Chinese 'pigtail' immediately suggests itself as affording a handle for something more than remarks. I do not know whether they are worn by the Celestial policeman, but if they are his effectiveness in an angry crowd must be annoyingly impeded; and in a social or domestic scrimmage tails

offer themselves as irresistible conveniences. Indeed, I suspect that the adoption of the moustache only by most of our own constables is attributable partly to their consciousness that a long beard would be too inviting in the thick of a mob.

It is curious that China displays two extreme examples (one at each end of the person) of fashionable servility, men showing it in the length of their hair, and women in the shortness of their feet. But it is when we look at the supposed adornments of the uncivilised that we are amazed at what men and women will submit to in order to render themselves attractive. One would think that the presumable exigencies of courtship would have interdicted huge nose-rings and the insertion of a disc (like a thick penny-piece) into the middle of the lower lip, even if teeth filed sharp and stained red or black, along with tattoo to the tip of the nose, were felt to add charms to those of maiden beauty. But we dismiss the thought, as having no bearing upon civilised customs, with the remark that there is no accounting for the whims of savage taste. 'Poor ignorant creatures! they know no better. As they are reclaimed and taught by us they will learn to see the pitiable absurdity of their notions about personal adornment.'

But have we any right to be altogether sure of this? In one respect, indeed, there are savages who have seen fit to discontinue their decorative efforts after contact with civilised nations, and to transfer them from the flesh to the dress. The young Maori no longer tattoos his face. It is true that in this matter his ancestors so far set a suggestive example in displaying their superiority to the sudden changes which 'fashion' now demands of its followers. Having decided that certain patterns upon the skin were desirably effective, they had the courage of their convictions, and accepted them as permanent. The original inventor of this artistic ornamentation was felt to have got hold of a good idea, and society was determined not to let it go. It is probable, indeed, that many a New Zealander whose face proclaims him to have been a fop in his young days would be gladly rid of such an indelible witness to a departed taste. An old chief who was visiting England once asked me (through an interpreter) what I thought would be good for his rheumatism, and when I suggested a Turkish bath a look came over his decorated face which seemed to imply that there was more of the same tracery about him than he would care to exhibit in a place of public resort.

When, however, we affect to associate 'paint and feathers'

with savagery we are not wholly without reason in taking care how we express ourselves. From the numerous advertisements of 'hair dyes,' 'poudre d'amour,' and the like, it would seem as if we did not confine our attentions to the covering of the body alone, and, indeed, since powder is only dry pigment, there is possibly as great a percentage of fashionable ladies who may be said to 'paint' their faces as would be found in a tribe of Chock-taws. The thing is managed better, no doubt; still, it is done, and there is a deceptive intention in the procedure of the civilised painters which cannot be laid to the charge of the squaw. She lays on the red ochre, or whatever it is, with a distinct purpose to have it perceived, and for this object restricts its application to, we will say, one side of her nose. There is no sham about the matter at all, but the lady who dabs her skin with the puff-ball is most conscious of her success when she fancies that her use of it will not be detected. To the wife of the 'South Wind' or 'Little Bear' her paint is no more an attempt at imposture than a coloured ribbon in a bonnet. She simply thinks that it is pretty to look at. Ladies hope that theirs will not be noticed; but 'powder' always betrays itself, and leaves the male imagination to suspect (sometimes to be sure) that its wearer is unpleasantly aware of external blemishes or defects in the face where it appears. Occasionally, its sole result is to draw attention to them, and to provoke the secret comment that the woman who uses it is trying to make herself agreeable by deception. And the prevalence of the practice, by which she seeks to justify herself, really does no more than add to the uncomfortableness of the impression which it produces upon the mind of the opposite sex.

Much the same may be said of male 'dye,' especially when applied to the beard. Those who shave their faces know how rapidly the stubble reappears upon the chin, but those who don't, seem to forget that the hair grows whether it be cut off with the razor or not, and that if the dyeing business is not repeated every morning a little tell-tale line of white, representing a day's growth, is drawn by the unfeeling finger of time between the dyed beard and the skin from which it springs. This, however, makes its most visible appearance below a man's ear, in a corner of the face's field which he does not see, except by a cunning arrangement of mirrors, but which is plainly open to the silent eyes of his friends.

These factors in the art of adornment—paint, powder, and dye—are, however, only what a farmer would call 'top-dressings,'

though, happily, they do sink beneath the living surface on which they are laid, like 'nitrate of soda' sprinkled on a field. But they claim more than an indirect notice in considering the subject which provides a title for my remarks, since we must remember that a 'paint-pot' was once the only 'portmanteau' of our ancestors, and that where climate permits it the most admired covering is still put on by many with the brush alone. When the kraal of Cetewayo was searched it was found that his 'full-dress uniform' was made of 'gold,' not woven into a robe, but kept in a bottle, being the 'dust' of that metal. Thus, when the king had been well oiled, and powdered with it, even Solomon in all his glory could never have presented so splendid a result. We may talk of our 'gilded youth,' but they would have made a poor show at an African levee.

Let us turn our dazzled eyes from such a brilliant display and look at some features and uses of 'dress,' properly so called. With us, that of a man especially is said to 'fit' only when it adapts itself to the human shape. We are measured by the tailor, with a great display of nicety and a running commentary of precise numerical directions. The 'well-dressed' man is distinguished more by the 'cut' than the colour or material of his clothes. But in old days even the most sumptuous of these must have been 'ready-made.' When Joseph gave his brother Benjamin 'five changes of raiment' we have no reason to suppose that he first sent for the 'Poole' of his day, or that there was any trying of them on before the return journey to Canaan. We may be sure that they were of the best, but they were brought at once out of the stores already in the palace. And when Gehazi ran after Naaman and begged for 'two changes of garments,' they were produced at once from the supply which the great man had brought with him to be given to the prophet for a reward.

It is a question whether we gain much by a departure from or rejection of Oriental dress. Loose raiment is by no means necessarily unbecoming, and we all admit its comfort when we would take our ease or engage in any strenuous exercise. In one case the garment chosen is roomy, in the other elastic. Even in doing sedentary brain work we eschew tight-fitting clothes. It seems as if the head cannot exert itself rightly unless the body is unencumbered, and when the limbs are brought into special play they must obviously be free. The terms used respectively by the Oriental and the Western to express readiness for action sound,

indeed, contradictory, since the one 'girds up his loins' and the other 'strips to his work,' but the same object is aimed at by both. Each seeks liberty of movement, and the modern athlete assimilates his dress as near as he can to that of the ancient, who appears to have dispensed with it altogether.

When, however, we ask which is the most 'becoming' costume, much plainly depends upon the shape of the body which it covers. In this respect if the Eastern gentleman has a poor figure he is fortunate in being able to conceal its imperfections by rich robes which hide his bandy legs or mitigate the lines of protuberance. On the other hand, if he resembles an Apollo the graceful proportions of his frame are unseen, while those of his European brother are displayed (to his own gratification) by close-clinging garments. It is perhaps almost a pity that freedom of choice between the two styles is not permissible, so that a man with an ungainly body should be at liberty to cover its defects, and one modelled to perfection might reveal the grace of his form. Only at a 'fancy' ball, however, can a bandy-legged cavalier make his appearance as a Turk and enjoy the consciousness of his disguise without being exposed to the charge of eccentricity.

It is, indeed, the fear of this which bars general reform or individual change more in 'dress' than in perhaps anything else. The present age having brought forth no special style of architecture, except such as is seen in Crystal Palaces, every man is at liberty to choose that of any period for his 'house' without ridicule or even comment. No doubt 'glass' is used only on a large scale, since a private dwelling constructed of it (however light and warm) would seem to invite proverbial remarks, even if it did not restrict action on the part of its inmate. But in seeking 'lodgment' we adopt Elizabethan, Grecian, Italian fashions at our will, affect the Norman or the Gothic as we please, or shelter ourselves under Queen Anne roofs without fear of deterrent criticism. If, however, a man dressed according to the style of the house he dwelt in, his friends would say that he had better take up his abode in Bedlam at once.

In the open adoption of our opinions we seem to have a wide choice without reproach. We may also clothe our thoughts in many fashions. Indeed, in this respect marked individuality may bring the flattering credit of genius, and yet, however theoretically desirable an unusual form of dress may be, neither man nor woman has the courage to use it except with the concurrence of society or



at the risk of being thought 'odd.' We do not even dare to follow comparatively recent customs. What bishop would now venture to walk down Piccadilly in a wig, or young squire to enter the Carlton wearing Hessian boots? It might be easier, indeed, to inaugurate than to resume a fashion in clothes, but whatever a woman may be found to do, a man must needs be exceptionally circumspect, indifferent, or uniquely secure in social esteem before he could safely show himself at the theatre in knickerbockers, however comfortable or becoming they may be. As it is, in cities he repudiates their chief excellence, and sometimes even uses artificial means to prevent his trousers 'bagging' at the knee, reserving the looser garment for the country and the field, though he would be glad to wear it in the streets. In some respects the man is a greater slave to fashion than the woman, who displays a variety in dress which is forbidden to him.

It is, however, in the cut and colour of their clothes rather than their convenience that women assert a greater liberty of choice. The very nomenclature of feminine raiment is bewildering to the ordinary masculine mind. I suppose that there are some who can interpret and attach an intelligible meaning to the description of a fashionable bride's dress which follows a full record of her marriage in the newspapers. They never mention that of the bridegroom, who is assumed to be conventionally habited in a way which needs no definition, but that of hers suggests an immediate qualifying appendix to the last impressive sentences in the marriage service which indicate the fit equipment of Christian wives in reference to the 'outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel.'

It is not, however, in any diversity of ornamentation or multitude of words used to define the several articles of visible female attire, that we chiefly recognise feminine subjection to the prevailing laws which regulate a woman's dress. It is rather seen in her persistent tolerance of what is manifestly inconvenient or hurtful. Though men do not wear high heels which impede progress and distort the sinews of the ankle and the foot, a glance into any shoemaker's window reveals that fashionable servility (common to both sexes) which leads them to cramp their toes and provide a continuous harvest for the corn-cutter. Men do not, however, sweep the streets, except with brooms, and no tailor displays patterns of male corsets, nor indeed (though some foolish dandies are said to lace) do I believe that any of my readers have

ever even seen one. But the frankly unreserved exhibition of 'stays' in shops, and the inhuman outlines of the female figure shown in dressmakers' pictorial advertisements (which affect no concealment from the masculine eye) reveal an ignoring of vertebrate anatomy and a defiance of physiological demands which would rouse the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to action if detected in the treatment of a colt, a lapdog, or a costermonger's ass. The only approximate parallel to this procedure which occurs to me now in the ordering of the brute creation may be seen in the use of bearing reins for horses, and the artificial enlargement of goose livers. But in one case the animal is said to be prevented from catching the driving-rein dangerously on the pole as he jerks his head up and down, and, in the other, painful restraint produces results which win toothsome approval by society. But the process is not felt to be imperatively fashionable among the geese themselves. And horses, if consulted, would probably object to any patterns of harness at all.

It may be admitted that much improvement has been made lately in the adaptation of dress, especially inner garments, to the changes of a capricious climate. Skill is shown in the fabrication of textures which ward off chills when worn next to the skin. Flannel, though warm to the touch, is found to be more suitable wear in hot weather than cool linen. And gentlemen (here indeed following the fashion of ladies) have discarded the stiff and cumbrous coverings to the neck worn by their grandfathers. It is true that some modern collars show a tendency to imitate the old-fashioned hard stock, but as a rule fashion permits men to move their heads about freely.

In the choice, or rather combination, of colours to be worn, there is, however (to the lovers of harmony), sore and evident need of perception. Many ladies seem to forget that the fit arrangement or juxtaposition of these is subject to laws as inflexible as any in nature. There is a balance in the contiguity of colours which so resents any displacement of their order as to produce an undefined, but unnatural, impression on the eye when it is disregarded. A divinely apt sequence and mingling of tints is displayed in the heavens themselves, but there are some who perversely dislocate those of the rainbow when they would put on glorious apparel. We may, indeed, see the teaching of nature in this respect, even in the dark. If any one of my lady readers (should I have been so fortunate as to have held her attention so

far) will glance at the sun and then close her eyes, she will see lustrous changes and combinations, which might indicate the most becoming harmony in the choice of her coloured clothes, and be helped to avoid committing those chromatic offences which some insistent dressmakers would lead her to be unwittingly guilty of. None of them should be permitted to follow their trade without first (like signalmen) producing a certificate that they are not 'colour blind.'

In thinking about what is pleasant to the eye in the matter of dress, we must not forget the important part which 'symbolism' plays in the effect produced by colour. There are books and treatises which profess to teach us what each represents, but the law by which it operates is mysteriously obscure. Why should 'red' (if it be so) rather than 'green' offend a bull? Is there any latent meaning in military tints? In these days when every recruit is taught how to 'find cover,' that of the English soldier serves to make him most visible as a mark. Does the blue of the sea determine that of the sailor's jacket? Are black trappings and clothes best fitted to express the feelings of the Christian mourner? The modern display of flowers at a funeral would seem to be a protest against such a supposition. Certainly there can be no greater contrast than that between the stubborn conservatism of the undertaker, and the beauty of the wreaths which are piled upon the coffin.

I will not meddle with the vexed question of ecclesiastical vestments, but it is fair to remark that what has been contemptuously stigmatised as a love of 'millinery' on the part of some clergy might as justly be charged against the defender of a flag. That is only so many yards of bunting, and yet men die in heaps around it as a symbol of their honour. We may differ as to what the token means, or the truth of what it professes to represent, but in either case it is significant. To many the 'colours' of a creed are as precious as those of a regiment, and the ecclesiastic is as conscientiously determined in defending them as the most loyal soldier can be in guarding his.

## CHARACTER NOTE.

### THE NURSE.

‘Il y a de méchantes qualités qui font de grands talents.’

PEG has an excellent situation. Her mistress has often said so herself. And *she* ought to know. ‘Eighteen pounds a year and all found is a great deal more, George, than most people give their nurses. And there isn’t anyone else who would put up with what I do from Margaret.’

There is no doubt at all that Peg has a passionate temper, and, at times, it is to be feared, a coarse tongue. She is short, sturdy, and eminently plebeian, with little, quick, black, flashing eyes. She is ignorant. The culture and polish of the Board School are not upon her. But when Nellie, her eldest charge, dares to doubt the statements Peg has made to Jack, *à propos* of the story of Alfred and the cakes, Peg chases Nellie round the table and boxes her ears. It will thus be seen that Peg is no fool.

Jacky is her especial care. Jacky is a gay soul of four. To say that Peg is proud of him would be but a miserable half-truth. She flings, as it were, Jacky’s charms of mind and person in the face of the Abigails of less favoured infants. She steadily exhibits every day, during a constitutional walk, Jack’s sturdy limbs and premature conversation to nurses whose charges have vastly inferior limbs and no conversation at all. It is unnecessary to add that Peg is exceedingly unpopular.

Jack is being ruinously spoilt. Mamma says so. Mamma, however, is not a person of strong character, and Peg is of very strong character. So Mamma cannot possibly help the spoiling. Peg indeed makes Jack obey *her*, but does not particularly impress on him to obey anyone else. She has been known, on rare occasions, to administer correction to him with a hand which is not of the lightest. But when Mamma punishes him Peg appears in the drawing-room trembling and white with rage, to announce that she will not stay to see the child ill-used. ‘This day month, if you please,’ and a torrent of abuse.

Of course it is not this day month. Mamma says, ‘I told you she would come round, George. Margaret is perfectly wide awake, I assure you, and knows a good place when she has it.’

So Peg keeps the good place—and Jack.

One summer she takes him down to a country manor to stay with his cousins. Before the end of the first week she has quarrelled with all the manor servants—especially the nurses. When Jacky, with a gay smile and guileless mien, puts out the eyes of cousin Nora's doll and Nora weeps thereat, Peg is seen smacking that infant in a corner. This is too much for the manor. And it is certain if Jacky had not most inconveniently fallen ill, the manor spare bedroom would have been wanted for other occupants, and Peg and Jacky would have returned home three weeks too soon.

There is not much the matter with Jacky. Only a croupy cold. And Peg knows all about these croupy colds. She tries upon it many terrible and ignorant remedies. Will not hear of the doctor being sent for, and one night suddenly sends for him herself. And the doctor sends for Jacky's parents. Peg is at the doorway to meet Mamma—hysterically reproachful from the cab window. Peg is quite white, with an odd glitter in her little eyes, and does not lose her temper. Before Mamma has been revived by sherry in the dining-room Peg is back again with the boy. She has scarcely left him for a week. He has already lost his pretty plumpness and roundness—a mere shadow of a child even now, with nothing left of his old self except a capacity for laughing—what a weak laugh!—and an odd sense of humour in grim satire to his wasted body and the grave faces round him. Only Peg laughs back at him; Mamma wonders how she can have the heart. But then, of course, one cannot expect a servant to feel what one does one's self. It may be because Peg is, after all, merely hired (eighteen pounds a year and all found), and is no sort of relation to Jack, that she can hold him in her arms, talk to him, sing to him by the hour together; that she can do with little rest and hurried meals; that she is always alert, sturdy, and competent.

Mamma thinks it is a blessed thing that the lower classes are not sensitive like we are. It is a very blessed thing—for Jack.

Papa is worn out with grief and anxiety before the colour has left Peg's homely face.

Mamma is incompetent and hysterical from the first, and is soon forbidden the sick-room altogether.

It is melancholy to record that when this mandate is issued a gleam of satisfaction—not to say triumph—steals over Peg's resolute countenance.

'He's getting on nicely, doctor, now, isn't he?' she inquires of the bigwig from Harley Street a day or two later. 'He' is Jack, of course. The large and pompous physician looks down at her through his gold-rimmed eye-glasses, and gives her to understand, not ungently—for though she is only the nurse, he thinks she has some real affection for the child—that Jack is dying.

'Dying!' Peg flashes out full of defiance, 'Then what's the use of your chattering and worriting and upsetting the place like this, if that's all you can do for him? Dying! We'll see about that.'

From that moment she defies them all. The consulting physicians, the ordinary practitioner, the night-nurse from Guy's, death itself, perhaps. She never leaves the child. The shadow of the old Jacky lies all day long on a pillow in her lap; sometimes all night too. When it is past saying anything else it says her name. It has its head so turned that it can see her face. When she smiles down at it, the forlornest ghost of a smile answers her back. She has an influence over it that would be magical if it were not most natural that devotion should be repaid by devotion, even from the heart of a child.

The consulting physician says one day that if there is a hope for the boy, that hope lies in Peg's nursing. It is the first time he has admitted that there can be a hope at all. Peg's face shines with an odd light which, if she were not wholly plain and plebeian, would make her beautiful.

One day, when the shadow is lying in her lap as usual, the night-nurse puts a telegram into her hand. When she has read it she lays Jacky on the bed and goes away. For the first time she does not heed his feeble cry of her name.

She finds the father and mother, and, with the pink paper shaking in her hand, says that her brother is dying; that she must go away. Blood is thicker than water, after all. She has but a few passions, but those few are strong; and the dying brother is one of them.

The father, broken down by the wretchedness of the past weeks, implores her to stay and save Jacky. But she is unmoved. Her brother is dying, and she must go.

The mother, abjectly miserable, entreats and prays, and offers her money, and Peg turns upon her with a flash of scorn far too grand for her stout and homely person.

And when she goes back to Jacky, a wan ghost of a smile

breaks through the tears on his face and he lifts a wizened hand to stroke her cheek, and says that it was bad to go away and she is not to go away any more.

And she does not.

Jacky gets better. It is as if Peg has fought with Death—as she would fight for Jacky with anything in this world or in any other world—and conquered. Jacky's case appears in the 'Lancet,' and the medical bigwigs shake their heads over it and are fairly puzzled. They have not the cue to the whole matter—which is Peg.

When Jacky is past a woman's care, Peg goes away. Papa and mamma don't spare expense, and give her a fivepound note as a parting present.

But she has another reward, wholly unsubstantial and satisfactory. In an undergraduate's rooms at Christ Church—an idle dog of an undergraduate by the way—amid a galaxy of dramatic beauty and in a terrible plush frame presented by herself there is a photo—of Peg.

And it is believed that the undergraduate, who is not in any other way remarkable for domestic virtue, actually writes to her.



### *PAGANS AT PLAY.*

It is probable that few of us who are in the habit of attending pantomimes, circuses, race-meetings, or athletic sports, ever take the trouble to glance backwards in order to compare these modern spectacles, their conduct and arrangements, with their prototypes of two thousand years ago. One thing is certain—namely, that if a Roman who had witnessed the shows organised by Julius Cæsar or Nero could have the opportunity of assisting at even the most thrilling of our nineteenth-century entertainments, he would be terribly bored, and would go away loudly lamenting the decadence of modern pleasures and the squeamishness of modern pleasure-seekers. He would look back with regretful longing to the splendid realism of the colossal spectacles that took place annually under the Empire—the large sums that were spent, the blood that was shed, and the lives that were sacrificed, in order ‘to make a Roman holiday.’

It was easy for an emperor to achieve popularity in pagan Rome. Not freedom, not reform, not education, but ‘bread and games’ were all that the people demanded, and perhaps in their hearts the games were held more necessary than the bread. The crimes of Nero and Caligula did not prevent them from being the idols of the mob, owing to their genius for inventing new sensations and organising magnificent entertainments; while all the virtues of Marcus Aurelius scarcely won him forgiveness for the foolish humaneness shown by his desire that the gladiators should fight with blunted swords, and that a net should be placed beneath the rope-dancers. The most avaricious of the emperors poured out money like water upon the public spectacles, knowing well that the people would stand no reductions in the sums devoted to that department.

Under the Republic there were seven performances annually, lasting in all about sixty-six days. These were paid for by the State, and usually cost a couple of thousand pounds of our money. Sometimes, however, games were given by some public-spirited individual who desired to gain popularity, or by sorrowing mourners at the funeral of friends or relations. Under the Empire the time occupied by these spectacles was increased to a

hundred and seventy-three days annually, and even more, while the cost of a brilliant show rose to seven or eight thousand pounds. The games, which usually began at sunrise and lasted till sunset, consisted of three distinct kinds: *i.e.* horse-and-chariot races, combats between gladiators, and combats between men and wild beasts; but into these many variations were introduced. The gladiators were, for the most part, criminals or prisoners of war; but a certain number of volunteers took part—patricians, and even emperors, occasionally appearing in the lists. After a time schools for gladiators were established in Rome, and the champions were exalted into public idols. Their *bonnes fortunes* were proverbial, their praises were sung by the poets, and their portraits appeared upon lamps and vases. The condemned criminals did not invariably meet their death in the arena. If they survived three years of fighting with men and beasts, they were released from their gladiatorial duties, while five years spent in the profession gave them their freedom.

The performances were advertised by means of *affiches* pasted on walls or buildings. On one of these placards, discovered at Pompeii, it is announced that shelter will be provided for the spectators in case of rain; in another that the arena will be well watered, in order that the dust may be laid. The night before the spectacle began a great banquet was given to the gladiators, presumably the volunteers or hired champions. At daybreak these heroes marched in procession to the amphitheatre, and after the signal had been given by a blast of trumpets, the fun began. The emperor and public officers attended in state, great ceremony was observed, and the citizens were expected to appear in their best attire. In rainy weather a mantle might be worn over the toga on condition that it was removed when the grandees arrived. In the intervals slaves staggered round laden with huge baskets of provisions, which were distributed gratuitously, while fruit, nuts, and small presents were scattered among the crowd by wealthy patricians.

The performance usually opened with horse-and-chariot races. The chariots were drawn by only two or three horses if the driver were a novice, and by six or eight if he were an accomplished whip. Each course lasted not less than half-an-hour, and was fourteen times round the lists. Race-horses were the objects of the most enthusiastic admiration, and their names and pedigrees were in everybody's mouth. Sometimes their hoofs were gilded;

while we read of one who was fed on almonds and raisins instead of hay and corn—an unsatisfying as well as indigestible regimen one would be inclined to think. Caligula owned a famous horse, to which he was so passionately attached that he built him a marble stable with an ivory manger, gave him purple harness with pearl collars, a gold vase for his oats, and a gold cup for his wine, and even went so far as to invite him to dinner at his own table. The night before the animal was to appear in the arena, the emperor ordered that perfect quiet should be preserved in the neighbourhood of his stable, in order that he might sleep undisturbed.

After the races came the gladiatorial contests. The prisoners of war, who were usually the chief combatants, came from all parts of the known world, and the variety of their costumes, arms, and methods of fighting gave additional interest to the scene. There were the men of Thrace with little round shields, the Samnites with large square shields, the Bretons with their chariots, and the Gauls laden with heavy armour. The gladiators fought sometimes in pairs, sometimes in troops of thirty on a side; but occasionally grand battles took place, in which thousands took part, and at the end of which the ground was covered with corpses. When a champion fell disabled he held up his finger to ask his life of the spectators. If these were in a merciful mood they, too, held up a finger; if not, they turned their thumbs down, and, according to contemporary writers, the ladies were usually the first to give the signal of death. Any symptom of fear on the part of a gladiator roused the fiercest wrath of the assembled multitudes, and the timid or hesitating were encouraged with whips and red-hot irons.

During the pauses for rest and refreshment, fresh sand was sprinkled on the blood-stained arena, and the dead were carried out by men wearing the mask of Mercury. Other officials, under the disguise of the Etruscan demon Charon, brought hot irons, with which they made sure that the apparent corpses were really dead, and not shirking. Biers were in readiness to carry the bodies to the mortuary chamber; and here, if a spark of life was found yet lingering in any poor mangled wretch, he was promptly put out of his misery.

New effects had constantly to be devised in order to stimulate the interest of the people, who became sated with blood and horrors. Combats by lamplight were organised, as well as contests

between dwarfs and even women, but the latter were soon forbidden. The introduction of wild beasts into the arena added a fresh sensation to the public games. The first animal combat took place in the year B.C. 186. Bulls, bears, stags, and many other beasts, exotic or home-bred, fought together or with men, who were called *bestiaries*. A hundred years later rarer creatures were introduced, such as crocodiles, hippopotami, rhinoceroses, and even the giraffe. The appearance of such animals says much for the cleverness of the hunters employed to cater for the Roman spectacles, since from gladiatorial days down to the early part of the present century no giraffes or hippopotami were brought to Europe owing to the extreme difficulty of capturing them alive.

At the *fête* of a hundred days given by Titus in the year 80, five thousand savage beasts of various kinds were shown in one day, and at the spectacle given by Trajan, which lasted four months, no less than eleven thousand animals were exhibited. Never was there such a splendid opportunity for the naturalist and the anatomist. The imperial menageries were, as might be expected, extraordinarily rich in rare creatures, and would quite have thrown our modern Zoological Gardens into the shade. The cost of the keep of so many carnivorous animals was enormous, and Caligula, in time of dearth, seriously considered the advisability of using criminals as fodder for his savage pets. The necessities of transport gave a wonderful stimulus to certain trades. The smiths and carpenters were kept hard at work making strong cages, while innumerable traps and lassoes had to be provided for the hunters who were employed in all parts of the world to take ferocious beasts alive. In spite of anxious care and vast expense, many were the disappointments caused by the non-arrival of eagerly expected living cargoes, owing to storms and contrary winds. During the long voyages, and the interminable journeys overland, when the heavy cages were dragged by slow bullocks, many of the animals died, and others arrived in so pitiable a plight that they were quite incapable of 'showing fight.'

The animals were usually introduced into the arena ornamented with variegated scarves, metal plaques, gold leaf, and tinsel. They were also painted in gaudy colours. Bulls were painted white, sheep purple, ostriches vermilion, and the lions had their manes gilded. The creatures were excited to fight by means of whips and darts, and sometimes two of different species were tied together, until, frantic with rage, they tore each other.

to pieces. Curious and unnatural contests were arranged, buffaloes being set to fight with bears, lions with giraffes, and tigers with rhinoceroses. *Chasseurs*, with English or Scotch hounds, fought the most savage beasts, and a distinguished champion could kill a bear with a blow of his fist, or vanquish a lion after blinding him by throwing a cloth over his eyes.

The Roman animal trainers must have been men of extraordinary genius, and would certainly have put our modern trainers to the blush. We hear of Julius Cæsar being lighted to his house by elephants carrying torches in their trunks, and Mark Antony being drawn through the streets by lions harnessed to his chariot. Unwieldy bulls learnt to walk on their hind-legs, stags were trained to obey the bit, and panthers to bear the yoke. Peaceable antelopes were taught to fight with their horns, and fierce lions were rendered as docile as dogs. In one of the spectacles given by Domitian a performing lion carried hares into the arena in his mouth without hurting them, let them go, and caught them again. Elephants wrote Latin verses, and danced on the tight-rope. Pliny tells of one of these animals who learnt less quickly than its fellows, and being anxious, presumably, to catch them up, or to escape punishment, was discovered rehearsing its lesson in the middle of the night.

Far more horrible and demoralising than the combats were the wholesale executions of prisoners, who were bound to posts in the middle of the arena, and devoured by the beasts that were let loose upon them. Sometimes the poor creatures were provided with arms, which only served to prolong their agonies for a few moments. In the year 47 multitudes of Breton prisoners were massacred in this fashion at Rome, while at the conclusion of the Jewish war 2,500 Jewish prisoners perished at Cæsarea during the public games. Pantomimes and *tableaux vivants* were terribly realistic entertainments under the Empire. Criminals appeared dressed in magnificent garments, from which flames suddenly burst forth and consumed the wearers. Ixion was shown on his wheel, and Mucius Scævola holding his hand in a brazier until it was reduced to ashes. Another poor wretch was supposed to represent Orpheus. He played upon the lute, and all nature seemed subjugated by his performance. Trees bowed down to listen to him, timid animals followed him, and birds perched on his head. Just as the spectators were beginning to weary of this innocent amusement, a bear rushed out, and being presumably

insensible to the charms of music, devoured the unfortunate minstrel, amid general applause.

The first occasion on which the amphitheatre was flooded and a naval combat represented was at one of the triumphs of Julius Cæsar. A second, on a larger scale, was given by Augustus in the year 2 B.C., when a sea-fight between the Athenians and the Persians was acted by thirty battle-ships, equipped with 3,000 men. But this was far eclipsed by a naval battle given by Claudius in celebration of the completion of the canal which was intended to carry the waters of Lake Celano across a neighbouring mountain. Two enormous fleets, one supposed to be Sicilian, the other Rhodian, appeared on the lake, armed with 19,000 men. The banks of the lake and the hills in the neighbourhood were covered with immense crowds of spectators, who had come from all parts of the country. The combatants, though criminals, fought bravely, but as the ships were surrounded by rafts guarded by cohorts, there was no chance of escape. When the time came for the waters to be drawn off it was found that the channel of the canal was not deep enough, the work had to be continued, and the undertaking was not finally completed until many years later, when another gladiatorial contest took place. At one of the naval combats organised by Nero fish and marine monsters were introduced, while Titus had horses, bulls, and other animals trained to perform their circus exercises in the water.

The rise of Christianity, with its doctrines of the sanctity of human life and the universal brotherhood of men, gradually put an end to these barbarous spectacles, and now the vast ruins of the public spectacles are the only relics still remaining to us of the pastimes of pagan Rome.

## WITH EDGED TOOLS.

### CHAPTER XXXVI.

#### NO COMPROMISE.

Where he fixed his heart he set his hand  
To do the thing he willed.

‘MY DEAR SIR JOHN,—It is useless my pretending to ignore your views respecting Jack’s marriage to Millicent; and I therefore take up my pen with regret to inform you that the two young people have now decided to make public their engagement. Moreover, I imagine it is their intention to get married very soon. You and I have been friends through a longer spell of years than many lives and most friendships extend, and at the risk of being considered inconsequent I must pause to thank you—well—to thank you for having been so true a friend to me all through my life. If that life were given to me to begin again, I should like to retrace the years back to a point when—little more than a child—I yielded to influence and made a great mistake. I should like to begin my life over again from there. When you first signified your disapproval of Millicent as a wife for Jack, I confess I was a little nettled; but on the strength of the friendship to which I have referred I must ask you to believe that never from the moment that I learnt your opinion have I by thought or action gone counter to it. This marriage is none of my doing. Jack is too good for her—I see that now. You are wiser than I—you always have been. If any word of mine can alleviate your distress at this unwelcome event, let it be that I am certain that Millicent has the right feeling for your boy; and from this knowledge I cannot but gather great hopes. All may yet come to your satisfaction. Millicent is young, and perhaps a little volatile, but Jack inherits your strength of character; he may mould her to better things than either you or I dream of. I hope sincerely that it may be so. If I have appeared passive in this matter it is not because I have been indifferent; but I know that my yea or nay could carry no weight.

‘Your old friend,

‘CAROLINE CANTOURNE.’



This letter reached Sir John Meredith while he was waiting for the announcement that dinner was ready. The announcement arrived immediately afterwards, but he did not go down to dinner until he had read the letter. He fumbled for his newly-purchased eyeglasses, because Lady Cantourne's handwriting was thin and spidery, as became a lady of standing; also the gas was so d——d bad. He used this expression somewhat freely, and usually put a 'Sir' after it as his father had done before him.

His eyes grew rather fierce as he read: then they suddenly softened, and he threw back his shoulders as he had done a thousand times on the threshold of Lady Cantourne's drawing-room. He read the whole letter very carefully and gravely, as if all that the writer had to say was worthy of his most respectful attention. Then he folded the paper and placed it in the breast pocket of his coat. He looked a little bowed and strangely old, as he stood for a moment on the hearthrug thinking. It was his practice to stand thus on the hearthrug from the time that he entered the drawing-room, dressed, until the announcement of dinner; and the cook far below in the basement was conscious of the attitude of the master as the pointer of the clock approached the hour.

Of late Sir John had felt a singular desire to sit down whenever opportunity should offer; but he had always been found standing on the hearthrug by the butler, and, hard old aristocrat that he was, he would not yield to the somewhat angular blandishments of the stiff-backed chair.

He stood for a few moments with his back to the smouldering fire, and, being quite alone, he perhaps forgot to stiffen his neck; for his head drooped, his lips were unsteady. He was a very old man.

A few minutes later, when he strode into the dining-room where butler and footman awaited him, he was erect, imperturbable, impenetrable.

At dinner it was evident that his keen brain was hard at work. He forgot one or two of the formalities which were religiously observed at that solitary table. He hastened over his wine, and then he went to the library. There he wrote a telegram, slowly, in his firm ornamental handwriting.

It was addressed to 'Gordon, Loango,' and the gist of it was—'Wire whereabouts of Osgard—when he may be expected home.'

The footman was despatched in a hansom cab, with instructions to take the telegram to the head office of the Submarine Telegraph Company, and there to arrange prepayment of the reply.

'I rather expect Mr. Meredith,' said Sir John to the butler, who was trimming the library lamp while the footman received his instructions. 'Do not bring coffee until he comes.'

And Sir John was right. At half-past eight Jack arrived. Sir John was awaiting him in the library, grimly sitting in his high-backed chair, as carefully dressed as for a great reception.

He rose when his son entered the room, and they shook hands. There was a certain air of concentration about both, as if they each intended to say more than they had ever said before. The coffee was duly brought. This was a revival of an old custom. In bygone days Jack had frequently come in thus, and they had taken coffee before going together in Sir John's carriage to one of the great social functions at which their presence was almost a necessity. Jack had always poured out the coffee—to-night he did not offer to do so.

'I came,' he said suddenly, 'to give you a piece of news which I am afraid will not be very welcome.'

Sir John bowed his head gravely.

'You need not temper it,' he said, 'to me.'

'Millicent and I have decided to make our engagement known,' retorted Jack at once.

Sir John bowed again. To anyone but his son his suave acquiescence would have been maddening.

'I should have liked,' continued Jack, 'to have done it with your consent.'

Sir John winced. He sat upright in his chair and threw back his shoulders. If Jack intended to continue in this way, there would be difficulties to face. Father and son were equally determined. Jack had proved too cunning a pupil. The old aristocrat's own lessons were being turned against him, and the younger man has, as it were, the light of the future shining upon his game in such a case as this, while the elder plays in the gathering gloom.

'You know,' said Sir John gravely, 'that I am not much given to altering my opinions. I do not say that they are of any value; but such as they are, I usually hold to them. When you did me

the honour of mentioning this matter to me last year, I gave you my opinion.'

'And it has in no way altered?'

'In no way. I have found no reason to alter it.'

'Can you modify it?' asked Jack gently.

'No.'

'Not in any degree?'

Jack drew a deep breath.

'No.'

He emitted the breath slowly, making an effort so that it did not take the form of a sigh.

'Will you, at all events, give me your reasons?' he asked. 'I am not a child.'

Sir John fumbled at his lips—he glanced sharply at his son.

'I think,' he said, 'that it would be advisable not to ask them.'

'I should like to know why you object to my marrying Millicent,' persisted Jack.

'Simply because I know a bad woman when I see her,' retorted Sir John deliberately.

Jack raised his eyebrows. He glanced towards the door, as if contemplating leaving the room without further ado. But he sat quite still. It was wonderful how little it hurt him. It was more—it was significant. Sir John, who was watching, saw the glance and guessed the meaning of it. An iron self-control had been the first thing he had taught Jack—years before, when he was in his first knickerbockers. The lesson had not been forgotten.

'I am sorry you have said that,' said the son.

'Just,' continued the father, 'as I know a good one.'

He paused, and they were both thinking of the same woman—Jocelyn Gordon.

Sir John had said his say about Millicent Chyne; and his son knew that that was the last word. She was a bad woman. From that point he would never move.

'I think,' said Jack, 'that it is useless discussing that point any longer.'

'Quite. When do you intend getting married?'

'As soon as possible.'

'A mere question for the dressmaker?' suggested Sir John suavely.

‘Yes.’

Sir John nodded gravely.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘you are, as you say, no longer a child—perhaps I forget that sometimes. If I do, I must ask you to forgive me. I will not attempt to dissuade you. You probably know your own affairs best—’

He paused, drawing his two hands slowly back on his knees, looking into the fire as if his life was written there.

‘At all events,’ he continued, ‘it has the initial recommendation of a good motive. I imagine it is what is called a love-match. I don’t know much about such matters. Your mother, my lamented wife, was an excellent woman—too excellent, I take it, to be able to inspire the feeling in a mere human being.—Perhaps the angels . . . she never inspired it in me, at all events. My own life has not been quite a success within this room; outside it has been brilliant, active, full of excitement. Engineers know of machines which will stay upright so long as the pace is kept up; some of us are like that. I am not complaining. I have had no worse a time than my neighbours, except that it has lasted longer.’

He leant back suddenly in his chair with a strange little laugh. Jack was leaning forward, listening with that respect which he always accorded to his father.

‘I imagine,’ went on Sir John, ‘that the novelists and poets are not very far wrong. It seems that there is such a thing as a humdrum happiness in marriage. I have seen quite elderly people who seemed still to take pleasure in each other’s society. With the example of my own life before me, I wanted yours to be different. My motive was not entirely bad. But perhaps you know your own affairs best. What money have you?’

Jack moved uneasily in his chair.

‘I have completed the sale of the last consignment of Simiacine,’ he began categorically. ‘The demand for it has increased. We have now sold two hundred thousand pounds worth in England and America. My share is about sixty thousand pounds. I have invested most of that sum, and my present income is a little over two thousand a year.’

Sir John nodded gravely.

‘I congratulate you,’ he said; ‘you have done wonderfully well. It is satisfactory in one way, in that it shows that, if a gentleman chooses to go into these commercial affairs, he can do as

well as the *bourgeoisie*. It leads one to believe that English gentlemen are not degenerating so rapidly as I am told the evening Radical newspapers demonstrate for the trifling consideration of one halfpenny. But—he paused with an expressive gesture of the hand—‘I should have preferred that this interesting truth had been proved by the son of someone else.’

‘I think,’ replied Jack, ‘that our speculation hardly comes under the category of commerce. It was not money that was at risk, but our own lives.’

Sir John’s eyes hardened.

‘Adventure,’ he suggested rather indistinctly, ‘travel and adventure. There is a class of men one meets frequently who do a little exploring and a great deal of talking. *Faute de mieux*, they do not hesitate to interest one in the special pill to which they resort when indisposed, and they are not above advertising a soap. You are not going to write a book, I trust?’

‘No. It would hardly serve our purpose to write a book.’

‘In what way?’ inquired Sir John.

‘Our purpose is to conceal the whereabouts of the Simiacine Plateau.’

‘But you are not going back there?’ exclaimed Sir John unguardedly.

‘We certainly do not intend to abandon it.’

Sir John leant forward again with his two hands open on his knees, thinking deeply.

‘A married man,’ he said, ‘could hardly reconcile it with his conscience to undertake such a perilous expedition.’

‘No,’ replied Jack with quiet significance.

Sir John gave a forced laugh.

‘I see,’ he said, ‘that you have outwitted me. If I do not give my consent to your marriage without further delay, you will go back to Africa.’

Jack bowed his head gravely.

There was a long silence, while the two men sat side by side, gazing into the fire.

‘I cannot afford to do that,’ said the father at length; ‘I am getting too old to indulge in the luxury of pride. I will attend your marriage. I will smile and say pretty things to the bridesmaids. Before the world I will consent under the condition that the ceremony does not take place before two months from this date.’

'I agree to that,' put in Jack.

Sir John rose and stood on the hearthrug, looking down from his great height upon his son.

'But,' he continued, 'between us let it be understood that I move in no degree from my original position. I object to Millicent Chyne as your wife. But I bow to the force of circumstances. I admit that you have a perfect right to marry whom you choose—in two months' time.'

So Jack took his leave.

'In two months' time,' repeated Sir John, when he was alone, with one of his twisted, cynic smiles, 'in two months' time—*qui vivra verra.*'

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## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### FOUL PLAY.

Oh, fairest of creation, last and best  
Of all God's works!

FOR one or two days after the public announcement of her engagement Millicent was not quite free from care. She rather dreaded the posts. It was not that she feared one letter in particular, but the postman's disquietingly urgent rap caused her a vague uneasiness many times a day.

Sir John's reply to her appealing little letter came short and sharp. She showed it to no one.

'MY DEAR MISS CHYNE,—I hasten to reply to your kind letter of to-day announcing your approaching marriage with my son. There are a certain number of trinkets which have always been handed on from generation to generation. I will at once have these cleaned by the jeweller, in order that they may be presented to you immediately after the ceremony. Allow me to urge upon you the advisability of drawing up and signing a pre-nuptial marriage settlement.

'Yours sincerely,

'JOHN MEREDITH.'

Millicent bit her pretty lip when she perused this note. She made two comments, at a considerable interval of time.

'Stupid old thing!' was the first; and then, after a pause, 'I *hope* they are all diamonds.'

Close upon the heels of this letter followed a host of others. There was the gushing, fervent letter of the friend whose joy was not marred by the knowledge that a wedding present must necessarily follow. Those among one's friends who are not called upon to offer a more substantial token of joy than a letter are always the most keenly pleased to hear the news of an engagement. There was the sober sheet (crossed) from the elderly relative living in the country, who, never having been married herself, takes the opportunity of giving four pages of advice to one about to enter that parlous state. There was the fatherly letter from the country rector who christened Millicent, and thinks that he may be asked to marry her in a fashionable London church—and so to a bishopric. On heavily-crested stationery follow the missives of the ladies whose daughters would make sweet bridesmaids. Also the hearty congratulations of the slight acquaintance who is going to Egypt for the winter, and being desirous of letting her house without having to pay one of those horrid agents, 'sees no harm in mentioning it.' The house being most singularly suitable for a young married couple. Besides these, the thousand and one who wished to be invited to the wedding in order to taste cake and champagne at the time, and thereafter the sweeter glory of seeing their names in the fashionable news.

All these Millicent read with little interest, and answered in that conveniently large caligraphy which made three lines look like a note and magnified a note into a four-page letter. The dressmakers' circulars—the tradesmen's illustrated catalogues of things she could not possibly want, and the jewellers' delicate photographs interested her a thousand times more. But even these did not satisfy her. All these people were glad—most of them were delighted. Millicent wanted to hear from those who were not delighted, nor even pleased, but in despair. She wanted to hear more of the broken-hearts. But somehow the broken-hearts were silent. Could it be that they did not care? Could it be that *they* were only flirting? She dismissed these silly questions with the promptness which they deserved. It was useless to think of it in that way—more useless, perhaps, than she suspected; for she was not deep enough, nor observant enough, to know that the broken-hearts in question had been much more influenced by the suspicion that she cared for them than by the thought that they cared for her. She did not know the lamentable, vulgar fact that any woman can be a flirt if she only degrade her womanhood



to flattery. Men do not want to love so much as to be loved. Such is, moreover, their sublime vanity that they are ready to believe any one who tells them, however subtly—mesdames, you cannot be too subtle for a man's vanity to find your meaning—that they are not as other men.

To the commonplace observer it would, therefore, appear (erroneously, no doubt) that the broken-hearts, having been practically assured that Millicent Chyne did not care for them, promptly made the discovery that the lack of feeling was reciprocal. But Millicent did not, of course, adopt this theory. She knew better. She only wondered why several young men did not communicate, and she was slightly uneasy lest in their anger they should do or say something indiscreet.

There was no reason why the young people should wait. And when there is no reason why the young people should wait, there is every reason why they should not do so. Thus it came about that in a week or so Millicent was engaged in the happiest pursuit of her life. She was buying clothes without a thought of money. The full joy of the trousseau was hers. The wives of her guardians having been morally bought, dirt cheap, at the price of an anticipatory invitation to the wedding, those elderly gentlemen were with little difficulty won over to a pretty little femininely vague scheme of withdrawing just a little of the capital—said capital to be spent in the purchase of a really *good* trousseau, you know. The word 'good' emanating from such a source must, of course, be read as 'novel,' which in some circles means the same thing.

Millicent entered into the thing in the right spirit. Whatever the future might hold for her—and she trusted that it might be full of millinery—she was determined to enjoy the living present to its utmost. Her life at this time was a whirl of excitement—excitement of the keenest order—namely, trying on.

'You do not know what it is,' she said, with a happy little sigh, to those among her friends who probably never would, 'to stand the whole day long being pinned into linings by Madame Videpoche.'

And, despite the sigh, she did it with an angelic sweetness of temper which quite touched the heart of Madame Videpoche, while making no difference in the bill.

Lady Cantourne would not have been human had she assumed the neutral in this important matter. She frankly enjoyed it all immensely.

'You know, Sir John,' she said in confidence to him one day at Hurlingham, 'I have always dressed Millicent.'

'You need not tell me that,' he interrupted gracefully. '*On ne peut s'y tromper.*'

'And,' she went on almost apologetically, 'whatever my own feelings on the subject may be, I cannot abandon her now. The world expects much from Millicent Chyne. I have taught it to do so. It will expect more from Millicent—Meredith.'

The old gentleman bowed in his formal way.

'And the world must not be disappointed,' he suggested cynically.

'No,' she answered with an energetic little nod, 'it must not. That is the way to manage the world. Give it what it expects; and just a little more to keep its attention fixed.'

Sir John tapped with his gloved finger pensively on the knob of his silver-mounted cane.

'And may I ask your ladyship,' he inquired suavely, 'what the world expects of me?'

He knew her well enough to know that she never made use of the method epigrammatic without good reason.

'A diamond crescent,' she answered stoutly. 'The fashion papers must be able to write about the gift of the bridegroom's father.'

'Ah—and they prefer a diamond crescent?'

'Yes,' answered Lady Cantourne. 'That always seems to satisfy them.'

He bowed gravely and continued to watch the polo with that marvellously youthful interest which was his.

'Does the world expect anything else?' he asked presently.

'No, I think not,' replied Lady Cantourne, with a bright little absent smile. 'Not just now.'

'Will you tell me if it does?'

He had risen; for there were other great ladies on the ground to whom he must pay his old-fashioned respects.

'Certainly,' she answered, looking up at him.

'I should deem it a favour,' he continued. 'If the world does not get what it expects, I imagine it will begin to inquire why; and if it cannot find reasons it will make them.'

In due course the diamond crescent arrived.

'It is rather nice of the old thing,' was Millicent's comment.

She held the jewel at various angles in various lights. There was no doubt that this was the handsomest present she had received—sent direct from the jeweller's shop with an uncompromising card inside the case. She never saw the irony of it; but Sir John had probably not expected that she would. He enjoyed it alone—as he enjoyed or endured most things.

Lady Cantourne examined it with some curiosity.

'I have never seen such beautiful diamonds,' she said simply.

There were other presents to be opened and examined. For the invitations had not been sent out, and many were willing to pay handsomely for the privilege of being mentioned among the guests. It is, one finds, after the invitations have been issued that the presents begin to fall off.

But on this particular morning the other presents fell on barren ground. Millicent only half-heeded them. She could not lay the diamond crescent finally aside. Some people have the power of imparting a little piece of their individuality to their letters, and even to a commonplace gift. Sir John was beginning to have this power over Millicent. She was rapidly falling into a stupid habit of feeling uneasy whenever she thought of him. She was vaguely alarmed at his uncompromising adherence to the position he had assumed. She had never failed yet to work her will with men—young and old—by a pretty persistence, a steady flattery, a subtle pleading manner. But Sir John had met all her wiles with his adamant smile. He would not openly declare himself an enemy—which she argued to herself would have been much nicer of him. He was merely a friend of her aunt's, and from that contemplative position he never stepped down. She could not quite make out what he was 'driving at,' as she herself put it. He never found fault, but she knew that his disapproval of her was the result of long and careful study. Perhaps in her heart—despite all her contradictory arguments—she knew that he was right.

'I wonder,' she said half-aloud, taking up the crescent again, 'why he sent it to me?'

Lady Cantourne, who was writing letters at a terrible rate, glanced sharply up. She was beginning to be aware of Millicent's unspoken fear of Sir John. Moreover, she was clever enough to connect it with her niece's daily increasing love for the man who was soon to be her husband.

'Well,' she answered, 'I should be rather surprised if he gave you nothing.'

There was a little pause, only broken by the scratching of Lady Cantourne's quill pen.

'Auntie!' exclaimed the girl suddenly, 'why does he hate me? You have known him all your life—you must know why he hates me so.'

Lady Cantourne shrugged her shoulders.

'I suppose,' went on Millicent with singular heat, 'that some one has been telling him things about me—horrid things—false things—that I am a flirt, or something like that. I am sure I'm not.'

Lady Cantourne was addressing an envelope, and did not make any reply.

'Has he said anything to you, Aunt Caroline?' asked Millicent in an aggrieved voice.

Lady Cantourne laid aside her letter.

'No,' she answered slowly, 'but I suppose there are things which he does not understand.'

'Things?'

Her ladyship looked up steadily.

'Guy Oscar, for instance,' she said; 'I don't quite understand Guy Oscar, Millicent.'

The girl turned away impatiently. She was keenly alive to the advantage of turning her face away. For in her pocket she had at that moment a letter from Guy Oscar—the last relic of the old excitement which was so dear to her, and which she was already beginning to miss. Joseph had posted this letter in Msala nearly two months before. It had travelled down from the Simiacine Plateau with others, in a parcel beneath the mattress of Jack Meredith's litter. It was a letter written in good faith by an honest, devoted man to the woman whom he looked upon already as almost his wife—a letter which no man need have been ashamed of writing, but which a woman ought not to have read unless she intended to be the writer's wife.

Millicent had read this letter more than once. She liked it because it was evidently sincere. The man's heart could be heard beating in every line of it. Moreover, she had made inquiries that very morning at the post-office about the African mail. She wanted the excitement of another letter like that.

'Oh, Guy Oscar!' she replied innocently to Lady Cantourne; 'that was nothing.'

Lady Cantourne kept silence, and presently she returned to her letters.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE ACCURSED CAMP.

Here—judge if hell, with all its power to damn,  
Can add one curse to the foul thing I am——

THERE are some places in the world where a curse seems to brood in the atmosphere. Msala was one of these. Perhaps these places are accursed by the deeds that have been done there. Who can tell?

Could the trees—the two gigantic palms that stood by the river's edge—could these have spoken, they might perhaps have told the tale of this little inland station in that country where, as the founder of the hamlet was in the habit of saying, no one knows what is going on.

All went well with the retreating column until they were almost in sight of Msala, when the flotilla was attacked by no fewer than three hippopotamuses. One canoe was sunk, and four others were so badly damaged that they could not be kept afloat with their proper complement of men. There was nothing for it but to establish a camp at Msala, and wait there until the builders had repaired the damaged canoes.

The walls of Durnovo's house were still standing, and here Guy Oscar established himself with as much comfort as circumstances allowed. He caused a temporary roof of palm-leaves to be laid on the charred beams, and within the principal room—the very room where the three organisers of the great Simiacine scheme had first laid their plans—he set up his simple camp furniture.

Oscar was too great a traveller, too experienced a wanderer, to be put out of temper by this enforced rest. The men had worked very well hitherto. It had, in its way, been a great feat of generalship, this leading through a wild country of men unprepared for travel, scantily provisioned, disorganised by recent events. No accident had happened, no serious delay had been incurred, although the rate of progress had necessarily been very slow. Nearly six weeks had elapsed since Oscar with his little

following had turned their backs for ever on the Simiacine Plateau. But now the period of acute danger had passed away. They had almost reached civilisation. Oscar was content.

When Oscar was content he smoked a slower pipe than usual—watching each cloud of smoke vanish into thin air. He was smoking very slowly, this, the third evening of their encampment at Msala. There had been heavy rain during the day, and the whole lifeless forest was dripping with a continuous, ceaseless clatter of heavy drops on tropic foliage; with a united sound like a widespread whisper.

Oscar was sitting in the windowless room without a light, for a light only attracted a myriad of heavy-winged moths. He was seated before the long French window, which, since the sash had gone, had been used as a door. Before him in the glimmering light of the mystic Southern Cross the great river crept unctuously, silently to the sea. It seemed to be stealing away surreptitiously while the forest whispered of it. On its surface the reflection of the great stars of the southern hemisphere ran into little streaks of silver, shimmering away into darkness.

All sound of human life was still. The natives were asleep. In the next room, Joseph in his hammock was just on the barrier between the waking and the sleeping life—as soldiers learn to be. Oscar would not have needed to raise his voice to call him to his side.

The leader of this hurried retreat had been sitting there for two hours. The slimy moving surface of the river had entered into his brain; the restless silence of the African forest alone kept him awake. He hardly realised that the sound momentarily gaining strength within his ears was that of a paddle—a single, weakly, irregular paddle. It was not a sound to wake a sleeping man. It came so slowly, so gently through the whisper of the dripping leaves that it would enter into his slumbers and make itself part of them.

Guy Oscar only realised the meaning of that sound when a black shadow crept on to the smooth evenness of the river's breast. Oscar was eminently a man of action. In a moment he was on his feet, and in the darkness of the room there was the gleam of a rifle-barrel. He came back to the window—watching.

He saw the canoe approach the bank. He heard the thud of the paddle as it was thrown upon the ground. In the gloom, to which his eyes were accustomed, he saw a man step from the boat

to the shore and draw the canoe up. The silent midnight visitor then turned and walked up towards the house. There was something familiar in the gait—the legs were slightly bowed. The man was walking with great difficulty, staggering a little at each step. He seemed to be in great pain.

Guy Oscar laid aside the rifle. He stepped forward to the open window.

‘Is that you, Durnovo?’ he said without raising his voice.

‘Yes,’ replied the other. His voice was muffled, as if his tongue was swollen, and there was a startling break in it.

Oscar stepped aside, and Durnovo passed into his own house.

‘Got a light?’ he said in the same muffled way.

In the next room Joseph could be heard striking a match, and a moment later he entered the room, throwing a flood of light before him.

‘*Good God!*’ cried Guy Oscar. He stepped back as if he had been struck, with his hand shielding his eyes.

‘Save us!’ ejaculated Joseph in the same breath.

The thing that stood there—sickening their gaze—was not a human being at all. Take a man’s eyelids away, leaving the round balls staring, blood-streaked; cut away his lips, leaving the grinning teeth and red gums; shear off his ears—that which is left is not a man at all. This had been done to Victor Durnovo. Truly the vengeance of man is crueller than the vengeance of God!

Could he have seen himself, Victor Durnovo would never have shown that face—or what remained of it—to a human being. He could only have killed himself. Who can tell what cruelties had been paid for, piece by piece, in this loathsome mutilation? The slaves had wreaked their terrible vengeance; but the greatest, the deepest, the most inhuman cruelty was in letting him go.

‘They’ve made a pretty mess of me,’ said Durnovo in a sickening, lifeless voice—and he stood there, with a terrible caricature of a grin.

Joseph set down the lamp with a groan, and went back into the dark room beyond, where he cast himself upon the ground and buried his face in his hands.

‘Oh, Lord!’ he muttered. ‘Oh, God in heaven—kill it, kill it!’

Guy Oscar never attempted to run away from it. He stood slowly gulping down his nauseating horror. His teeth were



clenched; his face, through the sunburn, livid; the blue of his eyes seemed to have faded into an ashen grey. The sight he was looking on would have sent three men out of five into gibbering idiocy.

Then at last he moved forward. With averted eyes he took Durnovo by the arm.

'Come,' he said, 'lie down upon my bed. I will try and help you. Can you take some food?'

Durnovo threw himself down heavily on the bed. There was a punishment sufficient to expiate all his sins in the effort he saw that Guy Osgard had had to make before he touched him. He turned his face away.

'I haven't eaten anything for twenty-four hours,' he said with a whistling intonation.

'Joseph,' said Osgard, returning to the door of the inner room—his voice sounded different, there was a metallic ring in it—'get something for Mr. Durnovo—some soup or something.'

Joseph obeyed, shaking as if ague were in his bones.

Osgard administered the soup. He tended Durnovo with all the gentleness of a woman, and a fortitude that was above the fortitude of men. Despite himself his hands trembled—big and strong as they were; his whole being was contracted with horror and pain. Whatever Victor Durnovo had been, he was now an object of such pity that before it all possible human sins faded into spotlessness. There was no crime in all that human nature has found to commit for which such cruelty as this would be justly meted out in punishment.

Durnovo spoke from time to time, but he could see the effect that his hissing speech had upon his companion, and in time he gave it up. He told haltingly of the horrors of the Simiacine Plateau—of the last grim tragedy acted there—how at last, blinded with his blood, maimed, stupefied by agony, he had been hounded down the slope by a yelling, laughing horde of torturers.

There was not much to be done, and presently Guy Osgard moved away to his camp-chair, where he sat staring into the night. Sleep was impossible. Strong, hardened, weather-beaten man that he was, his nerves were all a-tingle, his flesh creeping and jumping with horror. Gradually he collected his faculties enough to begin to think about the future. What was he to do with this man? He could not take him to Loango. He could not risk that Jocelyn or even Maurice Gordon should look upon this horror.

Joseph had crept back into the inner room, where he had no light, and could be heard breathing hard, wide awake in his hammock.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a loud cry :

‘Oscard ! Oscard !’

In a moment Joseph and Oscard were at the bedside.

Durnovo was sitting up, and he grabbed at Oscard’s arms.

‘For God’s sake !’ he cried. ‘For God’s sake, man, don’t let me go to sleep !’

‘What do you mean ?’ asked Oscard. They both thought that he had gone mad. Sleep had nothing more to do with Durnovo’s eyes—protruding, staring, terrible to look at.

‘Don’t let me go to sleep,’ he repeated. ‘Don’t ! Don’t !’

‘All right,’ said Oscard soothingly ; ‘all right ! We’ll look after you.’

He fell back on the bed. In the flickering light his eyeballs gleamed.

Then, quite suddenly, he rose to a sitting position again with a wild effort.

‘I’ve got it ! I’ve got it !’ he cried.

‘Got what ?’

‘The sleeping sickness !’

The two listeners knew of this strange disease. Oscard had seen a whole village devastated by it, the habitants lying about their own doors, stricken down by a deadly sleep, from which they never woke. It is known on the West Coast of Africa, and the cure for it is unknown.

‘Hold me !’ cried Durnovo. ‘Don’t let me sleep !’

His head fell forward even as he spoke, and he staring, wide-open eyes that could not sleep made a horror of him.

Oscard took him by the arms, and held him in a sitting position. Durnovo’s fingers were clutching at his sleeve.

‘Shake me ! God ! shake me !’

Then Oscard took him in his strong arms and set him on his feet. He shook him gently at first, but as the dread somnolence crept on he shook harder, until the mutilated inhuman head rolled upon the shoulders.

‘It’s a sin to let that man live,’ exclaimed Joseph, turning away in horror.

‘It’s a sin to let *any* man die,’ replied Oscard, and with his great strength he shook Durnovo like a garment.

And so Victor Durnovo died. His stained soul left his body in Guy Oscard's hands, and the big Englishman shook the corpse, trying to awake it from that sleep which knows no earthly waking.

So, after all, Heaven stepped in and laid its softening hand on the judgment of men. But there was a strange irony in the mode of death. It was strange that this man, who never could have closed his eyes again, should have been stricken down by the sleeping sickness.

They laid the body on the floor, and covered the face, which was less gruesome in death, for the pity of the eyes had given place to peace.

The morning light, bursting suddenly through the trees as it does in Equatorial Africa, showed the room set in order and Guy Oscard sleeping in his camp-chair. Behind him, on the floor, lay the form of Victor Durnovo. Joseph, less iron-nerved than the great big-game hunter, was awake and astir with the dawn. He, too, was calmer now. He had seen death face to face too often to be appalled by it in broad daylight.

So they buried Victor Durnovo between the two giant palms at Msala, with his feet turned towards the river which he had made his, as if ready to arise when the call comes and undertake one of those marvellous journeys of his which are yet a household word on the West Coast.

The cloth fluttered as they lowered him into his narrow resting-place, and the face they covered had a strange mystic grin, as if he saw something that they could not perceive. Perhaps he did. Perhaps he saw the Simiacine Plateau, and knew that, after all, he had won the last throw; for up there, far above the tablelands of Central Africa, there lay beneath high Heaven a charnel-house. Hounded down the slope by his tormentors, he had left a memento behind him surer than their torturing knives, keener than their sharpest steel—he had left the sleeping sickness behind him.

His last journey had been worthy of his reputation. In twenty days he had covered the distance between the Plateau and Msala, stumbling on alone, blinded, wounded, sore-stricken, through a thousand daily valleys of death. With wonderful endurance he had paddled night and day down the sleek river without rest, with the dread microbe of the sleeping sickness slowly creeping through his veins.

He had lived in dread of this disease, as men do of a sickness which clutches them at last; but when it came he did not recognise it. He was so racked by pain that he never recognised the symptoms; he was so panic-stricken, so paralysed by the nameless fear that lay behind him, that he could only think of pressing forward. In the night hours he would suddenly rise from his precarious bed under the shadow of a fallen tree and stagger on, haunted by a picture of his ruthless foes pressing through the jungle in pursuit. Thus he accomplished his wonderful journey alone through trackless forests; thus he fended off the sickness which gripped him the moment that he laid him down to rest.

He had left it—a grim legacy—to his torturers, and before he reached the river all was still on the Simiacine Plateau.

And so we leave Victor Durnovo. His sins are buried with him, and beneath the giant palms at Msala lies Maurice Gordon's secret.

And so we leave Msala, the accursed camp. Far up the Ogowe river, on the left bank, the giant palms still stand sentry, and beneath their shade the crumbling walls of a cursed house are slowly disappearing beneath luxuriant growths of grass and brushwood.

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCE.

Yet I think at God's Tribunal  
Some large answer you shall hear.

In a dimly-lighted room in the bungalow at Loango two women had been astir all night. Now, as dawn approached, one of them, worn out with watching, wearied with that blessed fatigue of anxiety which dulls the senses, had laid her down on the curtain-covered bed to sleep.

While Marie slept Jocelyn Gordon walked softly backwards and forwards with Nestorius in her arms. Nestorius was probably dying. He lay in the Englishwoman's gentle arms—a little brown bundle of flexile limbs and cotton night-shirt. It was terribly hot. All day the rain had been pending; all night it had held off until the whole earth seemed to pulsate with the desire for relief. Jocelyn kept moving so that the changing air wafted over the

little bare limbs might allay the fever. She was in evening dress, having, indeed, been called from the drawing-room by Marie; and the child's woolly black head was pressed against her breast as if to seek relief from the inward pressure on the awakening brain.

A missionary possessing some small knowledge of medicine had been with them until midnight, and, having done his best, had gone away leaving the child to the two women. Maurice had been in twice, clumsily, on tip-toe, to look with ill-concealed awe at the child, and to whisper hopes to Marie which displayed a ludicrous, if lamentable, ignorance of what he was talking about.

'Little chap's better,' he said; 'I'm sure of it. See, Marie, his eyes are brighter. Devilish hot, though, isn't he—poor little soul?'

Then he stood about, awkwardly sympathetic.

'Anything I can do for you, Jocelyn?' he asked, and then departed, only too pleased to get away from the impending calamity.

Marie was not emotional. She seemed to have left all emotion behind, in some other phase of her life which was shut off from the present by a thick curtain. She was patient and calm, but she was not so clever with the child as was Jocelyn. Perhaps her greater experience acted as a handicap in her execution of those small offices to the sick which may be rendered useless at any moment. Perhaps she knew that Nestorius was wanted elsewhere. Or it may only have been that Jocelyn was able to soothe him sooner, because there is an unwritten law that those who love us best are not always the best nurses for us.

When, at last, sleep came to the child, it was in Jocelyn's arms that he lay with that utter abandonment of pose which makes a sleeping infant and a sleeping kitten more graceful than any living thing. Marie leant over Nestorius until her dusky cheek almost touched Jocelyn's fair English one.

'He is asleep,' she whispered.

And her great dark eyes probed Jocelyn's face as if wondering whether her arms, bearing that burden, told her that this was the last sleep.

Jocelyn nodded gravely, and continued the gentle swaying motion affected by women under such circumstances.

Nestorius continued to sleep, and at last Marie, overcome by sleep herself, lay down on her bed.

Thus it came about that the dawn found Jocelyn moving

softly in the room, with Nestorius asleep in her arms. A pink light came creeping through the trees, presently turning to a golden yellow, and, behold! it was light. It was a little cooler, for the sea-breeze had set in. The cool air from the surface of the water was rushing inland to supply the place of the heated atmosphere rising towards the sun. With the breeze came the increased murmur of the distant surf. The dull continuous sound seemed to live amidst the summits of the trees far above the low-built house. It rose and fell with a long-drawn, rhythmic swing. Already the sounds of life were mingling with it—the low of a cow—the crowing of the cocks—the hum of the noisier daylight insect-life.

Jocelyn moved to the window, and her heart suddenly leapt to her throat.

On the brown turf in front of the house were two men, stretched side by side, as if other hands had laid them there, dead. One man was much bigger than the other. He was of exceptional stature. Jocelyn recognised them almost immediately—Guy Osgard and Joseph. They had arrived during the night, and, not wishing to disturb the sleeping household, had lain them down in the front garden to sleep with a quiet conscience beneath the stars. The action was so startlingly characteristic, so suggestive of the primeval, simple man whom Osgard represented as one born out of time, that Jocelyn laughed suddenly.

While she was still at the window, Marie rose and came to her side. Nestorius was still sleeping. Following the direction of her mistress's eyes, Marie saw the two men. Joseph was sleeping on his face, after the manner of Thomas Atkins all the world over. Guy Osgard lay on his side, with his head on his arm.

'That is so like Mr. Osgard,' said Marie, with her patient smile, 'so like—so like. It could be no other man—to do a thing like that.'

Jocelyn gave Nestorius back to his mother, and the two women stood for a moment looking out at the sleepers, little knowing what the advent of these two men brought with it for one of them. Then the Englishwoman went to change her dress, awaking her brother as she passed his room.

It was not long before Maurice Gordon had hospitably awakened the travellers and brought them in to change their torn and ragged clothes for something more presentable. It would appear that Nestorius was not particular. He did not mind dying

on the kitchen table if need be. His mother deposited him on this table on a pillow, while she prepared the breakfast with that patient resignation which seemed to emanate from having tasted of the worst that the world has to give.

Joseph was ready the first, and he promptly repaired to the kitchen, where he set to work to help Marie, with his customary energy.

It was Marie who first perceived a difference in Nestorius. His dusky little face was shining with a sudden, weakening perspiration, his limbs lay lifelessly, with a lack of their usual comfortable-looking grace.

'Go!' she said quickly. 'Fetch Miss Gordon!'

Jocelyn came, and Maurice and Guy Oscar; for they had been together in the dining-room when Joseph delivered Marie's message.

Nestorius was wide awake now. When he saw Oscar his small face suddenly expanded into a brilliant grin.

'Bad case!' he said.

It was rather startling, until Marie spoke.

'He thinks you are Mr. Meredith,' she said. 'Mr. Meredith taught him to say "bad case."'

Nestorius looked from one to the other with gravely speculative eyes, which presently closed.

'He is dying—yes!' said the mother, looking at Jocelyn.

Oscar knew more of this matter than any of them. He went forward and leant over the table. Marie removed a piece of salted bacon that was lying on the table near to the pillow. With the unconsciousness of long habit she swept some crumbs away with her apron. Oscar was trying to find the pulse in the tiny wrist, but there was not much to find.

'I am afraid he is very ill,' he said.

At this moment the kettle boiled over, and Marie had to turn away to attend to her duties.

When she came back Oscar was looking, not at Nestorius, but at her.

'We spent four days at Msala,' he said, in a tone that meant that he had more to tell her.

'Yes?'

'The place is in ruins, as you know.'

She nodded with a peculiar little twist of the lips as if he were hurting her.



'And I am afraid I have some bad news for you. Victor Durnovo, your master——'

'Yes—tell quickly!'

'He is dead. We buried him at Msala. He died—in my arms.'

At this moment Joseph gave a little gasp and turned away to the window, where he stood with his broad back turned towards them. Maurice Gordon, as white as death, was leaning against the table. He quite forgot himself. His lips were apart, his jaw had dropped; he was hanging breathlessly on Guy Oscar's next word.

'He died of the sleeping sickness,' said Oscar. 'We had come down to Msala before him—Joseph and I. I broke up the partnership, and we left him in possession of the Simiacine Plateau. But his men turned against him. For some reason his authority over them failed. He was obliged to make a dash for Msala, and he reached it, but the sickness was upon him.'

Maurice Gordon drew a sharp sigh of relief which was almost a sob. Marie was standing with her two hands on the pillow where Nestorius lay. Her deep eyes were fixed on the Englishman's sunburnt, strongly gentle face.

'Did he send a message for me—yes?' she said softly.

'No,' answered Oscar. 'He—there was no time.'

Joseph at the window had turned half round.

'He was my husband,' said Marie in her clear, deep tones: 'the father of this little one, which you call Nestorius.'

Oscar bowed his head without surprise. Jocelyn was standing still as a statue, with her hand on the dying infant's cheek. No one dared to look at her.

'It is all right,' said Marie bluntly. 'We were married at Sierra Leone by the English chaplain. My father, who is dead, kept a hotel at Sierra Leone, and he knew the ways of the—half-castes. He said that the Protestant church at Sierra Leone was good enough for him, and we were married there. And then Victor brought me away from my people to this place and to Msala. Then he got tired of me—he cared no more. He said I was ugly.'

She pronounced it 'ogly,' and seemed to think that the story finished there. At all events, she added nothing to it. But Joseph thought fit to contribute a *post scriptum*.

'You'd better tell 'em, mistress,' he said, 'that he tried to starve yer and them kids—that he wanted to leave yer at Msala

to be massacred by the tribes, only Mr. Osgard sent yer down 'ere. You'd better tell 'em that.'

'No,' she replied, with a faint smile. 'No, because he was my husband.'

Guy Osgard was looking very hard at Joseph, and, catching his eye, made a little gesture commanding silence. He did not want him to say too much.

Joseph turned away again to the window, and stood thus, apart, till the end.

'I have no doubt,' said Osgard to Marie, 'that he would have sent some message to you had he been able; but he was very ill—he was dying—when he reached Msala. It was wonderful that he got there at all. We did what we could for him, but it was hopeless.'

Marie raised her shoulders with a pathetic gesture of resignation.

'The sleeping sickness,' she said, 'what will you? There is no remedy. He always said he would die of that. He feared it.'

In the greater sorrow she seemed to have forgotten her child, who was staring open-eyed at the ceiling. The two others—the boy and girl—were playing on the doorstep with some unconsidered trifles from the dust-heap—after the manner of children all the world over.

'He was not a good man,' said Marie, turning to Jocelyn, as if she alone of all present would understand. 'He was not a good husband, but——' she shrugged her shoulders with one of her patient, shadowy smiles—'it makes so little difference——yes?'

Jocelyn said nothing. None of them had aught to say to her. For each in that room could lay a separate sin at Victor Durnovo's door. He was gone beyond the reach of human justice to the Higher Court where the Extenuating Circumstance is fully understood. The generosity of that silence was infectious, and they told her nothing. Had they spoken she would perforce have believed them; but then, as she herself said, it would have made 'so little difference.' So Victor Durnovo leaves these pages, and all we can do is to remember the writing on the ground. Who amongst us dares to withhold the Extenuating Circumstance? Who is ready to leave this world without that crutch to lean upon? Given a mixed blood—evil black with evil white—and what can the result be but evil? Given the climate of Western

Africa and the mental irritation thereof, added to a lack of education and the natural vice inherent in man, and you have—Victor Durnovo.

Nestorius—the shameless—stretched out his little bare limbs and turned half over on his side. He looked from one face to the other with the grave wonder that was his. He had never been taken much notice of. His short walk in life had been very near the ground, where trifles look very large, and from whence those larger stumbling-blocks which occupy our attention are quite invisible. He had been the third—the solitary third child who usually makes his own interest in life, and is left by or leaves the rest of his family.

It was not quite clear to him why he was the centre of so much attention. His mind did not run to the comprehension of the fact that he was the wearer of borrowed plumes—the sable plumes of King Death.

He had always wanted to get on to the kitchen table—there was much there that interested him, and supplied him with food for thought. He had risked his life on more than one occasion in attempts to scale that height with the assistance of a saucepan that turned over and poured culinary delicacies on his toes, or perhaps a sleeping cat that got up and walked away much annoyed. And now that he was at last at this dizzy height he was sorry to find that he was too tired to crawl about and explore the vast possibilities of it. He was rather too tired to convey his forefinger to his mouth, and was forced to work out mental problems without that aid to thought.

Presently his eyes fell on Guy Osgard's face, and again his own small features expanded into a smile.

‘Bad case!’ he said, and, turning over, he nestled down into the pillow, and he had the answer to the many questions that puzzled his small brain.

*(To be continued.)*

